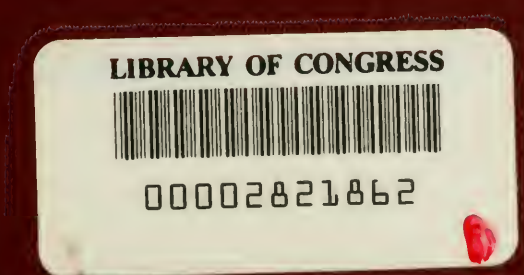
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IN PREPARATION

THE LESSER EVIL

A play dealing with the divorce problem

in four acts

THE WOMAN WHO COULD

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

JACINTA

BIGGS'S BAR

SONGS OF A CITY

IDYLLS OF GREECE
SERIES ONE

IDYLLS OF GREECE
SERIES TWO

THE WOMAN WHO COULD

A Play with a Purpose

BY

HOWARD V. SUTHERLAND

NEW YORK
Desmond FitzGerald, Inc.
1911

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1910

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1911

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M.C.W. Apr. 10'11

To

WALTER C. MEAD

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

JOHN CHESTER, *a middle-aged broker.*
MABEL CHESTER, *his wife—a woman of thirty-five.*
MYRTLE DUNCAN, *her sister—just out of her teens.*
RICHARD STETSON, *a middle-aged broker.*
ELIZABETH STETSON, *his wife—a woman past forty.*
ANN FLORRIWELL, *a wealthy woman in her thirties.*
HERON WALL, *a middle-aged lawyer.*
HENRY ELKINS, *a young man.*
ERMINIE, *maid to Mrs. Chester.*

The play takes place in New York at the present time, and covers two days, commencing Thursday afternoon.

ACT I

An afternoon at the home of Mrs. Stetson. *The drawing-room is furnished expensively.* Mrs. Stetson *is seated in an armchair.* Mrs. Chester *is seated opposite her. At one end of the room is a vestibule containing palms. From this vestibule enter the different guests. The drawing-room is supposed to face the street. Two windows show, and a door, opening into a dining-room.*

Mrs. Stetson

You have only done, my dear, what hundreds of other women have had to do. It cost me thousands to rise to my present position; and if I were to tell you who got my money in the first instance you would never believe me. We women always have to pay for the chance to be successful. On the stage, or in politics, we pay one man or another; in the social world we pay a more fortunate woman. And in the latter case we only part with money.

Mrs. Chester

It is a terrible state of affairs. I wonder if it is really worth while?

MRS. STETSON

Of course it is worth while. It is a part of the game of life. The democratic spirit is all very well in the country. It consoles the agriculturist for his lack of fine linen; although I understand the farmers are better off than they would have it generally known.

MRS. CHESTER

I am sometimes weary of the whole thing.

MRS. STETSON

Then you should make preparations for a trip to Europe. When Stetson is tired he invariably plunges. It has a better effect on him than surf-bathing, and someone else always foots the bills.

MRS. CHESTER

But if Chester should find out what I have done? Oh, Mrs. Stetson, perhaps I have jeopardized his fortune! And all for what?

MRS. STETSON

Nonsense, my dear. The bonds are perfectly safe. Stetson will merely put them up as security. From what I understand, they won't pass out of his hands. And before your husband misses

them, you shall have them back. They will enable Stetson to put through a deal, and you shall benefit by it. Besides, think what you are getting as a bonus—I think that is what they call it. The Ambassador has arranged for us to entertain the Crown Prince at dinner, only twelve guests to be present. Lord and Lady Monteith will be among the number, and Baroness Stotzenfeldt. When you have met these people the best houses in Europe will be open to you. Your husband has merely to give you the money.

MRS. CHESTER

Ah! We Americans never seem to be able to accomplish anything without money.

MRS. STETSON

Well, it is really all we have. With us it takes the place of blue blood; and as we have chosen to build our social structure thereon, we must see to it that it obtains for us the recognition elsewhere accorded to culture and breeding. Our grandchildren may have the breeding, and welcome. For myself, I am just as proud of my father as if he had been a Duke. Had he lived in England, he might have been knighted. His beer was just as good as Guinness's.

MRS. CHESTER

I wonder what the people to the manner born really think of us? However rich a woman, if they know her to be common they must despise her for her pretensions.

MRS. STETSON

They take the money, my dear; and if they say anything they say it behind her back, which isn't saying it at all. But you have had advantages, and when you meet these people you can hold your own with any of them. The American woman always can. And in society it is always better to be talked about, even slandered, than never mentioned at all. But you will win out.

MRS. CHESTER

I only hope the price doesn't prove too dear.

MRS. STETSON

A woman always pays for her ambition; men pay for their lack of it. You want to succeed socially. You might have taken up literature. You might have gone on the stage, although a scandal is almost a necessity for success in that line. You might have taken up philanthropy, or

interested yourself in dogs and cats. But you are going after bigger game, and you must be willing to risk more.

Mrs. Chester

John takes so little interest in society.

Mrs. Stetson

The American man never does, my dear. He is essentially a home animal; and considering what poor homes we women make him put up with, it is a wonder he stays in them at all. I have no sympathy with these women who would close the saloon yet seem incapable of opening homes of their own. If they have children, you will find them on the street or in the back alleys, but never in the nursery or the parlor. I know I'd be dissatisfied if I were a man.

Mrs. Chester

(as if to herself)

They are the best men in the world.

Mrs. Stetson

Yes, and we are not worthy of them. Intellectually we are often their superiors; in a few

generations we may outclass them physically; but, when it comes to downright affection, generosity, and consideration for the rights and feelings of others, we are away beneath them. American men are all right. If they weren't, we women might be better.

MRS. CHESTER

I wish I felt more at ease about money matters. To be candid with you, that is why I dropped in. Ever since I took the bonds out of our safe I have worried. Chester thinks they are still there.

MRS. STETSON

And they might just as well be there. Whether in your possession or in Stetson's, what difference does it make? Now, my dear girl, just dismiss the matter from your mind. They will be returned to you in a few days. Stetson will have put his deal through, and there'll be hundreds of thousands in it for him. You shall profit by it as well. He has promised me that emerald cross in Tiffany's, the one that came from the Proboff collection.

MRS. CHESTER

It is certainly a beauty. But haven't you enough jewels?

MRS. STETSON

My dear! What a question. Somebody has to have it. It isn't so much the possession of these things that gives one pleasure, as keeping someone else from owning them. And it would look magnificent on my yellow silk. Stetson is very generous, especially when it comes to jewels. And even if he doesn't pay cash for them, the tradespeople like to have our names on their books. It makes them feel they know us socially. I only hope Stetson's deal goes through to-morrow. Then I can get the cross and wear it on Saturday at the dinner. This is, let me think—Thursday.

MRS. CHESTER

Who will be here, Mrs. Stetson?

MRS. STETSON

At the dinner, the Crown Prince, the Ambassador, Lord and Lady Monteith and the Baroness, Mrs. Stuyvesaart, and Miss Elgin, the Philadelphia girl who was engaged to Lord Cromer, you know. Then, you and your husband, and Stetson and myself. The other man will be Heron Wall. He knows all the rest, with the exception of the Crown Prince, and he is a clever talker. I have

issued invitations to about twenty-five to drop in later, just names and nobodies. You are a better looker than the Philadelphia girl, and I shall see to it that you get your share of the Crown Prince.

MRS. CHESTER

That I get my money's worth, you mean!

MRS. STETSON

Don't be silly, child. It is merely a business matter.

MRS. CHESTER

I sometimes wonder if Europeans don't see through our so-called "business matters," but are too polite to say so.

MRS. STETSON

They think too slowly, my dear. And when an American woman is around they don't even think; they only look. When I was a girl I had a couple of them at my feet for years; but Stetson struck me as being a better money-maker, and that is what counts.

MRS. CHESTER

Ah! I wonder if it is? Chester is working all the time. When I go to the Coast he is sweltering in New York.

MRS. STETSON

He likes it, my dear. Our men soon forget the little they learn at college. Like Maeterlinck's bulldog, they look once at the stars, just once, and ever afterwards look on the ground. We mustn't get sentimental over them, or we shall spoil them. Your Englishman is too much of a star-gazer, except when he is looking after his own interests.

MRS. CHESTER

Is this Miss Elgin trying to catch a title?

MRS. STETSON

The Cromer affair rather opened her eyes. He insisted upon a cash settlement, you know. Of course, his title was clear, even if his estates were heavily mortgaged. But he was too brutal in his frankness, and I guess that is why she threw him over. Whether she really cared for him I don't know; few independent women do nowadays. I am

beginning to think that to love truly one must be poor.

MRS. CHESTER

Oh! don't say such things. I know Chester loved me, and in those days I had more than he. And, in your own case, neither of you was poor, yet——

MRS. STETSON

(interrupting)

My dear, you are an idealist. Stetson and I have made a good team. We have succeeded as the world understands success. But I doubt if ours is the ideal marriage by any means. Stetson makes money, and I spend it. We entertain lavishly, and—well, there it ends. It seems to be the aim of the average American marriage.

MRS. CHESTER

You mean there should be more to it?

MRS. STETSON

To make it marriage, yes. We are not serious enough in the undertaking. Marriage to us is a sort of farce-comedy; in fact it is too often merely

a preliminary to divorce. When it becomes in any way irksome or unpleasant, we separate and try again. We prefer cats and dogs to children, and silk gowns to money in the bank. I'm one of the sinners, so I ought to know.

MRS. CHESTER

Why not try to change things? If we women are so powerful, we are responsible for the condition of society.

MRS. STETSON

Exactly. But, my dear, no amount of preaching will ever make our society women other than what they are—shallow and feather-brained, dabblers, spenders, and gadders, satisfied with their unambitious men because they lack ambition themselves. Useless enough in prosperity, when adversity overtakes them they are of as little value to the community as is the vagabond or the waster. But we have to put up with them.

MRS. CHESTER

I hope I am of some value to the community.

MRS. STETSON

I hope you are, my dear. I know I am not.

[*Enter* HERON WALL.

WALL

My dear Mrs. Stetson! And Mrs. Chester! You see it is the privilege of an idler to call on you ladies in the afternoon.

MRS. STETSON

A husband has that pleasure only in the evening.

WALL

The overworked American husband!

MRS. CHESTER

Yes. Mrs. Stetson and I were just discussing him, and life in general.

MRS. STETSON

Especially married life.

WALL

(taking a seat)

And to what conclusions have you come, may I ask?

MRS. STETSON

I am afraid I have rather shocked Mrs. Chester by stating a few truths too plainly.

WALL

Please take me into your confidence. When a clever woman tells the truth, it must, indeed, be interesting.

MRS. CHESTER

A man is always sarcastic before dinner.

MRS. STETSON

And inclined to be sentimental after. But let us hear what Mr. Wall has to say.

WALL

I await cross-examination, and am prepared to suffer for the sins of my sex.

MRS. STETSON

I was arraigning women rather than men.

WALL

Ah! Then you were, indeed, telling the truth.

MRS. CHESTER

Perhaps we thought the men were hopeless.

WALL

We are your slaves, you know.

MRS. STETSON

(speaking rapidly)

No. Let us be candid with him. The men are more sinned against than sinning. How shall I put it? *(She pauses a few seconds.)* That society is diseased. That we women are to blame. That we demand of our husbands, and of the men who may become our husbands, the sacrifice of their souls for the gratification of our whims. That we marry merely to better our own condition rather than to establish a fine relation with a man whom we should love, and whose welfare should be our chief desire. That society is responsible for the individual failure, for the individual crime and the individual suicide; and that as society, as generally understood, is composed in the main of women, and is governed by them, that women must be held responsible for the general rottenness of our social life.

WALL

A terrible arraignment, indeed, and rather sweeping.

MRS. CHESTER

I am sure we are not all bad. Many of us are only victims of conditions that existed long before we had our being.

MRS. STETSON

But we are none the less culpable. We put up with those conditions instead of combating them. And therein we are all equally guilty.

WALL

Twenty years ago I hoped to change society. To-day—well, I am wiser to-day.

MRS. STETSON

It must be changed if we are to remain a sane people. We dance on the edge of the precipice. A step too far and we are over. To-morrow, I may be among the unfortunate!

MRS. CHESTER

(startled)

You don't mean——

MRS. STETSON

(hurriedly interrupting)

No! no! Of course not. I was speaking impersonally. We are safe, thank God! I'm one of the spenders, but Stetson is a Napoleon and can always foot the bills.

WALL

Don't you think the American man prefers a spender, Mrs. Stetson? The gambling instinct is stronger in us than the instinct to save. It is only the foreigner who thinks of To-morrow.

MRS. STETSON

Then so much the better for the foreigner. He may not accord his women the freedom the American husband allows to his, but they are at least safe. They don't live in daily expectation of being sold out, impoverished, and seeing their husbands working for their wealthy friends or—dead by their own hands.

MRS. CHESTER

Don't picture such horrible things. Mr. Wall, can't you say something in favor of society?

WALL

A bachelor can apologize for anything, you know, even matrimony. For me, society means dinners, cards, an occasional dance—I am selfish enough to accept invitations only when I care to; chats in cozy corners, machines, pretty dresses. It suits me; but, then, I have no responsibilities.

MRS. STETSON

Were you married *(*WALL *holds up his hand)* and had children, you might think otherwise.

WALL

In our set, to be married seems the safest insurance against children. It is fortunate that among the middle class are to be found men and women as human as were our parents.

MRS. CHESTER

A bachelor can hardly be expected to know anything about the cost of bringing up children, and the other responsibilities connected with them.

WALL

Why! As to that, Mrs. Chester, I am perhaps right in asserting that the brooch you are wearing

has cost more than would the maintenance of a healthy child for a year. And—I repeat that, being unmarried, I am hardly a person to express an opinion on the subject—I am inclined to believe that if our married women were willing to have a child to occupy their attention, they might be less inclined to waste their time at cards and teas; they might even feel less need of jewels and fine clothes. From what I can see, the average husband works himself to death so that his wife can keep a cat or dog in comfort and entertain her friends.

MRS. CHESTER

I think you exaggerate the case. As Mrs. Stetson said, were you married you might think differently.

WALL

But, being unmarried, love has not made me blind. And, from what I can make out, a husband gets nothing that is not within the reach of the single man. Is it companionship? When it comes to companionship the bachelor can have a dozen women-friends to the husband's one. If the meaning of the American home is, as it seems to be, a flat or an apartment where no children are allowed, the bachelor can maintain it as easily. No, I see

no reason why the bachelor should envy the average husband. At least, not in this country where he seems to be absolutely under the yoke of his wife.

MRS. STETSON

(speaking nervously)

We are all friends here. The day has come when all the world must be friends, and must discuss these things. We must see wherein we have erred, and we must rectify wrongs. The race depends on what the individual does. So I can say that I know society is all wrong, that we women are wrong, that I have lived wrong. If I had it to do all over again, how differently I would do! What have Stetson and I outside of our money and position? What have I? What has he?

[*There is a pause in the conversation for about ten seconds.*

WALL

(quietly)

We are all in the same boat. I guess I might have made more of myself had I cared to. But let us give our workers what credit is due them. Stetson is busy from morn till night; and to my

knowledge, Mrs. Chester, your husband has not taken a vacation for ten years.

MRS. CHESTER

Yes. The men work all the time. I sometimes wonder how they do it.

MRS. STETSON

They have to, my dear, to keep things going. If it weren't for the energy of our men the nation would be bankrupt in a year. The thing is: what do we women give them for their hard work? Certainly no home life.

MRS. CHESTER

Chester has never complained about ours.

WALL

Why should he, Mrs. Chester?

MRS. STETSON

Half our men don't know what home really means; what it should be. If they did, they might care less about business.

WALL

Of that disease you can never cure them, Mrs. Stetson. As you know, I allow the law to occupy

but very little of my time. The law is no longer a profession; it has become a trade, and, to be successful, a lawyer must be at the beck and call of a politician, or a corporation, or a Trust. Independence means poverty to him. But were I a business man, I am sure I should do as my neighbor, work day and night and accumulate money. A man's success is judged nowadays by the money he makes.

MRS. STETSON

And women are responsible for society's acceptance of such a standard. Before a girl is really old enough to think, she hears her parents discussing the financial status of So-and-so. She sees her mother's discontent if an acquaintance can spend more money on dress, entertainments, or luxury. And when she passes into the society of older girls she hears them considering the means of their young men friends, and so comes to appraise them at their financial rather than their moral worth.

WALL

Well, perhaps it is better to accustom a young girl to what she must expect when she is older. This is likely to be remembered as the century

of few babies and no children. We treat them as adults at twelve, ask their opinions at fifteen, and act upon their advice before they are twenty. For myself, I am glad to have been a real boy, although it seems to have been long ago.

MRS. CHESTER

(reminiscently)

And I would gladly be a girl again.

MRS. STETSON

It is only in our children that we re-live our youth.

WALL

Then we are undoubtedly doomed to remain a nation of adults. What with her clubs and social functions, and her continual endeavors to emulate the woman richer than herself, the average woman of to-day, if she had a child, would be too busy to take note of the fact.

MRS. STETSON

We are likely to hear some interesting ideas at the dinner-table on Saturday. Lady Monteith is a very advanced woman, and is not afraid to express her convictions.

WALL

The English have mastered the difficult art of eating and conversing at the same time. Unfortunately, we Americans fill ourselves in silence.

MRS. STETSON

Or discuss real estate values, the merits of our machines, or the latest scandal.

WALL

Than which, at the dinner-table, the heaviest silence would be preferable.

MRS. CHESTER

(to WALL*)*

Mrs. Stetson has told me you know her guests with the exception of the Crown Prince.

WALL

Yes. The Ambassador and I are old friends, and I have shot with Monteith in Scotland. The Baroness has told me her troubles in three capitals of Europe, and I knew Stuyvesaart before he forgot his by dying of apoplexy. I was one of the lawyers who made it impossible for Cromer to benefit by the Elgin millions. As for the

Crown Prince, well, outside of the aristocratic set, royalty confers the privilege of its friendship only on tradespeople and the demi-monde. Except, of course, when, instead of going to the Opéra Comique, it comes to America.

MRS. CHESTER

Mr. Wall seems to agree with me that these foreigners see through our pretenses. I wish the old days and the old ways would come back, so that we could be sincere.

WALL

Sincerity, my dear lady, has never existed. Life has always consisted of playing at make-believe. In Europe, they pretend to be aristocratic; here we pretend to be equal.

[*Enter* MYRTLE DUNCAN *and* ELKINS.

MRS. STETSON

(rising to greet them)

Ah! here comes Youth; and youth is life, sincere, hopeful, gorgeous! *(To* MYRTLE.*)* Dear, I am glad to see you. *(Turning to* ELKINS.*)* And you too, Henry. Could we always have young people near us, there would be no need of doctors.

WALL

(rises)

But there might be more need of us lawyers. How are you, Miss Myrtle?

MRS. CHESTER

Silence, cynic. Come and sit by me, Henry. I want to know about the position you are after.

MYRTLE

(as she and MRS. STETSON *and* WALL *take their seats)*

I waited outside while he kept an appointment with the Secretary. But you won't get much out of him. I couldn't.

MRS. STETSON

Tell us, Henry.

ELKINS

It is still hanging fire. Say, Mrs. Stetson, if this doesn't go through, I'm going to ask Mr. Stetson to give me a job.

MRS. STETSON

Anything but a stockbroker, Henry. You are not the kind to go comfortably through life while your victims curse you in poverty, or from a suicide's grave. I hope the day of the promoter and the gambler is almost over.

WALL

That day can never come, Mrs. Stetson. We are all too eager to make money without working for it.

ELKINS

(enthusiastically)

Not all of us.

WALL

The great majority, then. And, were it not for the pleasant sensation of uncertainty connected with the adventure, there would be but few marriages.

MRS. CHESTER

Is that why some men marry rich women?

WALL

Partly. Because, if the gold is all they are after, my opinion as a bachelor is a man can get it far easier, and with less suffering and loss of self-respect by going to the Klondyke. I would sooner face a bear at fifty below zero than a rich wife at boiling point.

MYRTLE

Lord Cromer thought otherwise.

WALL

Yes; but he was an Englishman and a lord. And while poverty sharpens one's wits and sensibilities, over-much leisure is apt to blunt them. A lord will do anything sooner than work.

MYRTLE

Even marry?

WALL

Exactly.

MRS. STETSON

Then he is no worse than many of our society women. It all comes back to what I was saying before you came in.

ELKINS

And what was that, Mrs. Stetson?

WALL

No, no! I protest, Mrs. Stetson. Here is a young man, standing expectantly on the threshold of life. His finger on his lips—you remember the line describing Joy? At any rate it is all ahead of him. He believes in everything and everybody. Why shatter his best illusion—belief in women and their influence for good?

MYRTLE

I think you are horrid!

MRS. STETSON

Belief in good women is not illusion; but had I a boy of my own I should teach him to discriminate between good women, the women who work in one way or another, and the idlers of our own set. And it is these women I am decrying.

MRS. CHESTER

(plaintively)

But how can one help doing nothing when everything is done for you? I study Italian; my maid cannot do that for me.

WALL

A labor, indeed.

MRS. STETSON

My dear, there is so much we could do had we only the instinct to know what. How many of us consider the responsibility attached to having servants? We order them about, and pay them their wages; and in the same spirit we write our checks monthly, and forward them to the Associated Charities. Having done this, we think we have done our share of looking after our servants and the poor. It is the modern interpretation of our duty to our neighbor.

MYRTLE

I know what Mrs. Stetson means. She would have us remember that we are all human, that distinctions are only the result of circumstance; and that it is the duty of men and women to treat those who are less fortunate also as men and women. I sometimes wonder how we women can clothe ourselves in expensive silks and satins, when the girl who shows us the goods has to live on four or five dollars a week.

WALL

The dream of the dreamer!

MRS. STETSON

Years ago it was the dream of the dreamer; to-day it is the battle-cry of everyone interested in the welfare of the race. Wealth has made us forget our obligations.

MRS. CHESTER

I am sure I am good to Erminie. She has one evening a week to herself. I give her my old dresses. I can't invite her in to take tea with me.

MYRTLE

But we might perhaps add to the comfort of her bedroom.

WALL

Practical Miss Myrtle!

MRS. STETSON

We women waste our time. If we have children we neglect them; and the younger women are growing up, believing that the duties of motherhood can be relegated to the nursemaid.

WALL

But think what experts they are at bridge!

MRS. CHESTER

And I am the Secretary of a Mothers' Club. Chester never seems dissatisfied.

MYRTLE

Think of it! When am I to become an aunt, Mabel?

MRS. STETSON

And neither is Stetson dissatisfied, my dear. But the reason is, as I said before, the average American man has almost forgotten what a home should be. He graduates from the boarding-house to the apartment. He passes from the surveillance of the landlady to that of the janitor. No wonder that he spends most of his time in his office.

ELKINS

And yet women are back of every move for reform. Don't you think we are more advanced than any other people? And isn't the credit for that advance chiefly due to our women?

MRS. STETSON

To a few women, rather; the majority do nothing. Consciously, or unconsciously, we hinder the work of the others.

MYRTLE

Yet, one by one, the idlers fall into line. Besides giving, wealthy women are seeing the necessity of doing.

WALL

When the daughters of the wealthy join the ranks of the reformers, my dear Miss Myrtle, it is only for the sake of the notoriety. It is the latest scheme to get their names and pictures in the papers.

MRS. STETSON

The deeds that have the greatest influence for good are the little deeds done in the home. Let the men attend to cleaning up politics; but let a woman make her home what it should be, and her children what they ought to be. If things go on as they are at present, inside of fifty years the Government will have to father and mother the little ones.

WALL

Well, I don't see how you are going to change things. For women to give up their freedom would be retrogression, and, although we have many failings, that of going backward is not one of them.

MRS. CHESTER

And a woman who is accustomed from childhood to being petted and made much of, is not going to give up everything and become serious.

MRS. STETSON

Then she must expect a rude awakening sooner or later. One has to pay for frivolity and idleness, just as one has to pay for gambling and speculation.

ELKINS

By the bye, as we came along the newsboys were shouting about more trouble on Wall Street. I didn't hear the particulars, but quite a number of firms are said to be involved.

[MRS. STETSON *starts.*

MRS. CHESTER

I always dread these Wall Street panics.

MRS. STETSON

Everybody dreads them. Wall Street is a menace to every woman in the country. Legitimate business, from the West to the East, is endangered. There will be no safety for anyone until the power of the speculators is curtailed. No man knows it better than Stetson; and he has often said that if he could get out, he would take his money and invest it in the West.

WALL

The West is certainly drawing the money of the country. There was a time when it all came here, but now it is beginning to flow the other way. The irrigation projects are making Colorado a Paradise, and even London is looking there for investments.

ELKINS

England seems to be paying the penalty for its centuries of exploitation of the masses by the classes. Sooner or later the price has to be paid.

MRS. CHESTER

Yet one is always hearing how progressive the Englishwomen are.

MRS. STETSON

Conditions in society are no less rotten there than they are here. Earnest women are to be found everywhere. But the majority, in England as in America, are idlers, triflers, and spenders. It remains to be seen whether England can pull herself together. But it is of far greater importance for us to profit by her example, and the first step must be taken by us women—if we want to save our men.

ELKINS

Hear that, Myrtle? From now on you will please discourage me from sending you candy and violets; and when we take in a show, you will please say you prefer sitting in the gallery, for the sake of the exercise!

WALL

And I shall immediately write a brief for the Nickelodeons. Perhaps we can head society there instead of to the Grand Opera, which only one in a thousand can understand. Once make it the thing for the Four Hundred to do, and the Ten Thousand will flock there. It makes but little difference what such people see or hear. They

wish only to be seen and heard—especially when music is offered them.

MYRTLE

(looking at WALL*)*

The men never take things seriously.

MRS. CHESTER

Perhaps that is why they accomplish so much.

ELKINS

Myrtle doesn't like the idea of climbing to the gallery.

MYRTLE

I don't mind where I sit if I'm with the right man.

MRS. STETSON

Now, don't quarrel. We shall neither have to resort to the Nickelodeons, nor give up candy and flowers. So many people are thinking along these lines that good is bound to follow. I only hope a crash doesn't come before the good day arrives.

WALL

Ah! The Golden Age; the dream of dreams, the one thing impossible of realization!

[*While he is speaking, voices are heard in the vestibule, and a few seconds later* STETSON *and* CHESTER *enter.*

MRS. STETSON

Here come the men.

WALL

Shearing must be over early to-day.

[STETSON *crosses and shakes hands with* MRS. CHESTER; CHESTER *with* MRS. STETSON. STETSON *then shakes hands with* MYRTLE.

STETSON

You see, I thought I'd run up and see my home before dusk. Picked up Chester on the way, and we come as a surprise to you. Chester, how does your wife look to you by daylight?

[*The two men take seats.*

CHESTER

Uncommonly well and attractive. Never knew I had such a good one.

ELKINS

How's that for a man married fifteen years?

WALL

American plan—no children.

MRS. STETSON

Mr. Chester's remark substantiates what I have been saying. *(To her husband.)* Richard, we want to begin anew.

STETSON

To do what?

MRS. STETSON

To get away from the uncertainty of things; give up society——

WALL

(interrupting)

Live on a farm, wear overalls, and that sort of thing.

MRS. STETSON

Not at all, but to try to live a life a little more like the lives of those who are not ashamed of the soil.

CHESTER

We are all too much accustomed to luxury to do that, Mrs. Stetson.

STETSON

(laughing)

Could you get along without your machine?

ELKINS

I see where you don't get one, Myrtle. Or sixty-dollar hats.

MRS. STETSON

I would give up everything if I knew that by so doing I could rid ourselves of the sword that is ever suspended above us. I could sacrifice all luxury if I thought that by taking a place a little lower down I could be of service to those in need.

CHESTER

How about it, Mabel? Are you willing to give up your trip abroad this year, and stay at home to darn my socks? I believe there are twenty or thirty pair needing attention.

MRS. CHESTER

(hesitatingly)

I don't know. I—— Oh, don't be foolish.

STETSON

(placing his hands on his knees, and leaning forward)

He is only joking, Mrs. Chester. We are up, and we must stay up. No going backward for us. Elkins here isn't thinking of any farm. In a couple of years he will want his touring car and a house off Central Park. Wall doesn't truckle to politicians or corporations for business, because he is well fixed, and doesn't need more money. Chester and I are in the ring, in the business ring; and we are there to make money for our wives. If anyone crosses us, so much the worse for him; that is to say, if it don't turn out the worse for us. But that's all in the game. While men are men, and women are women, the game will go on. I win, you lose; you win, I lose. *(He talks excitedly.)* But while I'm in the ring I win if I can. Hang ethics. Let the high-brows talk all they like, and stay poor. I'm here to make money, and it don't affect me what the other fellow does

afterward. Let him hang himself if he has a mind to. I'm after the cash—K-A-S-H—cash!

MYRTLE

(horrified)

But, Mr. Stetson, you kill yourself getting it.

STETSON

Maybe, my girl; but one kills one's self if one loses it; and I'd rather keep fighting and die by inches than——

MRS. CHESTER

(interrupting)

Don't, Mr. Stetson! You give me the horrors. You men are all the same. Chester has spells, and talks money to me until I hate the very mention of it.

STETSON

(quietly)

But we have to have it, my dear Mrs. Chester. It pays for your clothes, for your jewelry, for your electric. Without money, you could have no dinners at Sherry's, no trips to Europe. And we men are glad to make it for you; were we not

busy making fortunes for you to spend we might be wrecking empires.

MRS. STETSON

And as it is, you wreck individuals.

STETSON

(laughing)

Maybe, but they have the chance to wreck us.

CHESTER

It's a great game.

STETSON

And both sides have equal chances.

WALL

(sitting up and listening)

I thought I heard a noise on the street.

ELKINS

Probably a late extra.

STETSON

(nervously)

The boys are always crying something or other. Things were a little unsettled on the Street this afternoon.

MYRTLE

Listen! I can hear him.

STETSON

Wait!

[*He approaches one of the windows and opens it. Everyone is silent in the room; a few seconds later the hoarse voice of a newsboy is heard in the distance, calling:* "Extry! 'Ere y'are. All about the smash on Wall Street. 'Undreds ruined. 'Ere y'are. Extry!" STETSON *closes the window, and leans against it, facing the room.*

MRS. STETSON

(rises)

Oh! it is all so terrible. Richard——

STETSON

(lifting his hand)

No, I'm all right, dear. I know the men who have gone down; but I'm safe.

CHESTER

Don't worry, Mrs. Stetson. He probably ate mushrooms at lunch.

ELKINS

(rising)

I will slip out and get the sheet. The servants don't want to be set talking.

[*Exit* ELKINS.

WALL

That's right. *(Goes over to a side table on which is a decanter, pours out a glass of whisky, and takes it over to* STETSON.*)* You fellows get scares all the time. Drink this, old man. You need a bracer.

MYRTLE

Mrs. Stetson, I'm a convert to the Simple Life idea.

WALL

For ten minutes.

MRS. CHESTER

Come and sit down, Mr. Stetson. If John had to worry like that——

CHESTER

(interrupting)

I'm too easy-going for that, my dear.

STETSON

(returning to his chair)

Don't believe him. Every man worries if he truly loves his wife. *(To his wife.)* Don't be frightened, old girl. I've been a little upset to-day; liver, probably; otherwise this thing wouldn't have worried me.

MRS. STETSON

(leaning over her husband)

We must give it up, Richard. It isn't worth while.

WALL

Don't be nervous. It will all be forgotten by to-morrow.

STETSON

(abstractedly)

Eh? To-morrow! What about to-morrow?

WALL

I said you'll be yourself in a few minutes. It will all be forgotten by to-morrow.

STETSON

Yes, yes. I'm just a little upset.

MRS. STETSON

You must give it up, Richard; for my sake.

STETSON

Well, when I've turned this one deal, perhaps I may.

CHESTER

Nonsense! You are run down. Jump into your car, and take a good spin before dinner. What you need is fresh air.

MYRTLE

(as ELKINS *appears with a paper)*

Here comes Henry.

ELKINS

(giving the paper to STETSON*)*

There's a long list of them. But your name isn't down.

STETSON

(glancing through the list)

No, I knew I was safe. *(He evidently has to control himself.)*

WALL

Eh? Well, it's all in the game. So long as you aren't hurt, what's the difference?

MRS. CHESTER

(rising)

It is awful to think of so many being ruined. Come, Myrtle.

MRS. STETSON

These are only the Agents. Of their victims we shall never hear.

STETSON

Ah! the Great Many. Good God! May we never be among them.

(CURTAIN)

ACT II

It is evening of the same day. Sitting-room of CHESTER'S *apartment; the blinds are drawn. A door opens into the room.* CHESTER *is seated at his wife's writing-table, going over some papers which he puts back into a drawer.* ELKINS *is seated in an armchair. At the end of the room, portières are hanging, hiding another door.*

ELKINS

Same old performance, eh? Every time I drop in you seem to be looking over the bills.

CHESTER

Yes; it is one of the rights of the American husband. His cherished prerogative is to pay them. Kings do no more.

ELKINS

Or seldom as much.

CHESTER

Well, there's a sort of satisfaction in it, anyhow. What one might call fulfilling one's destiny. You will know all about it one of these days.

ELKINS

Not in the near future, I hope. Whenever I contemplate matrimony I inquire into the price of the women's hats. If that doesn't produce the necessary chill I go into autos; and, then, there are always plenty of women willing to discuss the servant question with me.

CHESTER

(rises and takes a cigarette from a box on the table)

Such matters should not be talked over before the very young, and hopeful.

ELKINS

That might be construed as conspiracy. Throw me a cigarette. Even if Mabel runs up bills, she lets you smoke around the house. I know lots of women who won't. That shows you've a wise one.

CHESTER

Thanks.

ELKINS

The man who can smoke around his own home is usually content to stay there instead of warming the chairs in his club.

CHESTER

Why don't you write a book, "How to Get Along, Though Married"? But you are right. She's a brick, my boy. May you get as good a one. It isn't her fault if feathers come high.

ELKINS

That's so. And, being a woman, she likes to wear them. You and I indulge in imported cigarettes. I guess a man wants his wife to look dressy. Mabel makes a better appearance than many a woman with a fortune to draw against.

CHESTER

She knows how, you see. When a woman can do that——

ELKINS

(interrupting)

Her husband has a pudding, eh?

CHESTER

Well, that's one way of expressing it. I suppose we all have to worry occasionally. Mabel knows how all right, and yet our bills do seem to keep on getting bigger. But, then, what's a

man for if not to make money? The way we look at things to-day, if a man can't make money he's no good. I don't mean to say that the best men are those that make the most money, but if a man can't do it the world thinks there must be something the matter with him. You will have to buckle down to it one of these days.

[*The portières part slowly, and* MYRTLE *enters. She seems to be aware of only* ELKINS, *who rises to greet her.* CHESTER *takes up an evening paper and reads.*

ELKINS

(rises)

Hello, Myrtle!

MYRTLE

I thought I heard your voice. Mabel will be here soon.

ELKINS

I suppose a crowd is coming to-night. Let's sit down here; I've news to tell you.

[*They take seats in a corner.*

MYRTLE

(excitedly)

You've won out?

ELKINS

Better than I expected, Myrtle. And you are the first to hear of it.

CHESTER

(still reading)

I don't count.

MYRTLE

Of course you don't. Tell me about it, Henry.

ELKINS

There isn't much to it. I didn't like to tell you the details this afternoon. About fifty applications were sent in for the job. They were boiled down to three, mine being among them. The Secretary sent for me; and while you were waiting in Madison Square he put me through the "sweating" process. An hour ago I got a Special Delivery letter saying I had won out, and I am to show up the first of the month.

CHESTER

Good for you, Henry. You've got a job in a thousand.

ELKINS

I feel pretty glad myself. You see, I've tried to prepare myself for a position like this. I've worked hard. I've never felt that the world owed me a job, or that pull could get me the right kind of one. I've stuck to one thing, and tried to learn it thoroughly, and I've not been ashamed to get my hands dirty if my brains could profit by it. Old What's-his-name said I was pretty young; but I have an idea he thought he could make more of a young chap willing to learn than of an old chap who wanted to have his own way. And he was so decent that I got to talking about all I'd like to do—the sort of stuff you and I have talked about, Myrtle,—and although I guess it was rather nervy, he seemed to like it. Anyhow, when I got up to go, he put his hand on my shoulder, and said: "Stick to your ideals, my boy, through thick and thin. They say we Americans are cold business men; but perhaps we are dreamers, after all. At heart, we all want to do right, and time may prove that our way was best. There is so

much to be accomplished by sticking to our ideals." It sort of encouraged me to hear him talk like that. And his letter has strengthened me in my beliefs.

MYRTLE

Good again for you, Henry. Thinking right is doing right; and the man who does right gets there every time.

CHESTER

(folds the paper, rises from his chair, and takes a place behind the young people)

Old man, all you've said is true. You know, I'm no preacher; but you've expressed what thousands of other men feel, yet can't say. We are just as much idealists as men of other nationalities. Perhaps more so, because we accomplish greater things. And behind the deed there must always be the dream. I'm just one of the Great Many, whose work it is to act a little part and make one person happy; but I've had my dreams, too, just as every man on the street has had his. When you are as old as I am, may you see in your dreams the foundations of your success, and may your ideals accompany you into the shadow.

We build for ourselves a perfect future by our actions of to-day.

MYRTLE

I wonder what Mabel would think could she hear him talking like that?

CHESTER

She has had her dreams, too.

MYRTLE

(flippantly)

Of bridge prizes!

CHESTER

Of other things, Myrtle.

ELKINS

Of course she has, and dreams still, I'll wager. Take that out of a woman's life and what has she left to fall back on?

MYRTLE

Cards, novels, and gossip, O innocent idealist!

CHESTER

Myrtle is flippant to-night, Henry. Ask her if she is never guilty of dreaming along with the rest of us.

MYRTLE

The rest of us! You evidently include yourself among the Chosen Few. Yet all you do when you come home is to read the paper and talk small-talk with Mabel. I've never caught you with a magazine in your hand, much less a book. Your dreams aren't the real article, John.

ELKINS

(as CHESTER, *making a gesture of impatience, walks away from them)*

Now you've made him mad. Judge not that ye be not judged, Myrtle. We are all dreamers, I guess, because we are always wishing for something we cannot get.

[*The door is opened by* ERMINIE, *who announces* MR. WALL. MR. WALL *enters.* ERMINIE *retires, closing the door.*

WALL

(advancing to shake hands with MYRTLE*)*

Good-evening, everybody. Miss Myrtle, I want to congratulate you on your article on "The Old Ideal" in last week's *Academy*. I have just read it at the Club. When you are a woman of thirty——

MYRTLE

(interrupting)

Horrors!

WALL

When you are a woman of thirty may you still have the same views, and may every editor in the country ask you to express them.

CHESTER

More horrors! No, I didn't mean that. We are very proud of Myrtle. She has said what I think but cannot express.

WALL

(seating himself)

And the trouble with so many men is that they say what they think, but don't think very deeply. How's that, Elkins? You seem quiet this evening.

MYRTLE

Wrapped in his dreams.

CHESTER

No, he isn't. He landed that position a few hours ago, and——

WALL

(interrupting)

Then I congratulate you, too, my boy. Your foot is on the first rung of the ladder, and it's an important day.

ELKINS

Thanks. But I was thinking of Myrtle's article. It was fine, wasn't it? I wish I could write like that. I have plenty of good thoughts, but I've never been able to put them down on paper. They get as far as my finger-tips, and then seem to vanish. Myrtle is a genius.

MYRTLE

Only sane, Henry. I got a lot of my ideas from hearing you talk.

CHESTER

Where's Mabel? Why doesn't she come in? Guess I'll go after her.

[*Rises from his chair and is going towards the portières, but* MYRTLE *intercepts him.*

MYRTLE

Don't bother her, John. She will be here soon.

CHESTER

Why, is anything the matter? She seemed depressed at dinner. That letter must have upset her.

MYRTLE

No. It was probably an invitation to something or other. I will go and tell her we have a guest.

WALL

(rising)

Oh, don't trouble her, Miss Myrtle. Mrs. Chester won't consider me a visitor. Please let me drop in again.

CHESTER

No, no. Sit down, Wall. She will be here directly. *(*MYRTLE *goes out through the portières.)* Besides, we expect Miss Florriwell. She rang up Myrtle an hour ago and said she was coming.

ELKINS

(helps himself to a cigarette)

Then we are in for it. Stay, Wall, and help us out.

WALL

(takes his seat again)

Another case of a good woman with nothing to do. The microbe appears to be catching, although Miss Florriwell tries to interest herself in things. In every house where I visit, the servant question seems to be paramount, and I wonder why women won't give their attention to the settling of that question rather than want to mix up in politics. With troubles in the home, I doubt if we shall ever have perfection outside of it. However, I don't let it bother me very much.

CHESTER

My wife keeps out of it. A little too much society and bridge, perhaps; but I'd sooner have her do that than interest herself in the City Hall.

WALL

(deliberately)

And yet, if I were married *(with emphasis)*, if I were married I should prefer to have my wife interested in good government rather than in bridge.

ELKINS

My views exactly. She might help in the one, but she could never change society.

WALL

I don't mind the society part of it so much. We are all social animals, more or less; but when a man's wife plays cards she is flirting with the devil.

CHESTER

You mean if she plays for stakes, and big money at that?

WALL

I mean just what I said—if she plays cards. It is only a matter of time for the stakes to fol-

low. Given the opportunity, the best of women will gamble. The law of chances is in favor of losses rather than gains; and if I were married—I state the conditions, you see—I would prefer to know that my wife had never owed man or woman, even in a friendly way, so small a sum as a dollar.

CHESTER

A trifling debt, my dear fellow, and easily paid.

WALL

Sometimes, and sometimes not so easily. It is not so much the amount as the principle involved. *(Rising.)* Ah! the ladies!

[*While he is speaking the portières part, and* MRS. CHESTER *and* MYRTLE *appear together, their arms about each other.* MRS. CHESTER *looks anxiously at all in the room, and apparently evades the glance of* WALL. *At the same moment the door is opened by* ERMINIE, *and* MISS FLORRIWELL *is announced.* MISS FLORRIWELL *enters, and the men rise.*

MRS. CHESTER

(goes forward quickly to greet her)

My dear Ann! I am so glad to see you. You must take off your hat.

MISS FLORRIWELL

No, Mabel. I have just come in for a few minutes. *(Turning to* MYRTLE *and kissing her.)* Really to see this child.

[CHESTER *and* ELKINS *approach and shake hands with her;* WALL *bows from where he stands, also to* MRS. CHESTER, *who now sees him.* ELKINS *gives* MISS FLORRIWELL *a chair, and all are seated.*

WALL

I came over on the same mission, Miss Florriwell. She has accomplished something. Mrs. Chester, what have you to say about your sister's work?

MRS. CHESTER

To tell the truth, I have not yet read the article. But Myrtle understands. Whatever she does is right. And she is brighter than the rest of us.

MYRTLE

No brighter, Mabel. More interested, perhaps.

WALL

The outlook is indeed hopeful when young people interest themselves in reform. Personally, I have rather given up hope. Things seem at sixes and sevens, pretty much mixed. But, then, I belong to the Old School.

MISS FLORRIWELL

And the Old School created the problems which the New School must solve. Myrtle thinks she belongs to the Old School because she defends some of the olden ways. But at heart she is New School.

ELKINS

The old order changeth. If only a few more would see things as we see them, Miss Florriwell, this would be a better world for all of us. Of course, I'm young, and all that; but I believe in expressing one's views, altering them from time to time as one progresses, and continually looking forward to the better day ahead.

CHESTER

Good boy, Henry. The rest of us will jog along in the well-worn ruts so that the world's equilibrium won't be upset. *(He picks up the paper again and glances over it.)* I wonder if your appointment will appear in to-morrow's paper? This is a late edition. It all seems to be about the fight.

[*While he is speaking,* ELKINS *leaves his seat and glances over* CHESTER'S *shoulder at the paper.* MISS FLORRIWELL *moves to a chair beside* MYRTLE, *who has taken a magazine off the table to show to her.* WALL, *who has risen, takes a seat beside* MRS. CHESTER. MISS FLORRIWELL *and* MYRTLE *engage in subdued conversation, and* ELKINS *points out a paragraph to* CHESTER.

WALL

(to MRS. CHESTER*)*

You received my note?

MRS. CHESTER

Yes, but not until dinner time. Couldn't you have told me about it this afternoon?

WALL

The opportunity did not present itself.

MRS. CHESTER

Please do not raise your voice.

WALL

(looking around)

The others cannot hear us. Needless to say, I regret what has happened.

MRS. CHESTER

And yet you take sides against me?

WALL

Because I think I can serve you best by so doing. I am also a friend of Mrs. Morton, you know.

MRS. CHESTER

I must have been crazy last Tuesday.

WALL

Mrs. Morton evidently does not think so. She claims she loaned you this money in response to a business-like request on your part. She says you undertook to pay it the day following. According to her statement you promised this distinctly. Think back. Was it so?

[*In the few seconds she is trying to recollect, the voices of* MISS FLORRIWELL *and* MYRTLE *are heard.*

MYRTLE

Some of the ideas may seem old-fashioned to you.

MISS FLORRIWELL

No, my dear; and even if they were they would not be hurtful to anything the New Woman advocates. The ideal remains the same, whether old or new.

[MRS. CHESTER *passes her hand across her eyes. The other women return to their magazine.*

MRS. CHESTER

I cannot remember having said that. I think I promised to repay the money during the month.

WALL

Er—excuse me—had you taken anything to drink?

MRS. CHESTER

Only——

WALL

(interrupting and raising his hand)

Thank you. That is all I wanted to know. I will call to-morrow at eleven if I may, and see you when we can talk. This matter must be arranged, and I think we can do so without bothering Chester.

MRS. CHESTER

I wish I dared tell him.

WALL

It may not be necessary.

[MRS. CHESTER *is about to reply, when a ring at the telephone is heard.* MRS. CHESTER *makes a gesture of fear.* CHESTER *leaves the room, closing the door.*

MYRTLE

(who has looked up)

Why, Mabel! You are as pale as a ghost. Aren't you well, dear?

[MYRTLE *leaves* MISS FLORRIWELL, *and goes over to her sister.* WALL *rises and chats with* ELKINS.

MRS. CHESTER

The room is rather warm. I am all right now.

MISS FLORRIWELL

You had better let me take you for a short ride in my electric. The night is delightful.

MRS. CHESTER

I am all right now, Ann. What were you and Myrtle talking about?

MYRTLE

The old subject, dear. There, you do look better.

MRS. CHESTER

Yes, I am better again.

ELKINS

Too much society, Mabel. You want to rest up for a time. It is wearing you out. We only live once, you know.

WALL

Then shouldn't we get out of it all we can?

MISS FLORRIWELL

All that's good, you mean.

MRS. CHESTER

I wonder what keeps John so long?

MYRTLE

Now you look worried again!

ELKINS

He is all business, you know. Someone is probably asking him the price of Union Pacific.

MYRTLE

(jokingly)

Or your milliner, dear.

[*They all laugh.*

WALL

Milliners never telephone. They call.

[CHESTER *enters. They all look at him with the exception of* MRS. CHESTER. *Her hand goes to her heart.*

MYRTLE

Bills, John?

CHESTER

(going to his old chair)

No. The Stetsons—— *(*MRS. CHESTER *starts to her feet;* CHESTER *looks at her.)* Why! What

is the matter, dear? You are terribly nervous to-night.

MRS. CHESTER

No, no; nothing. What about the Stetsons, John?

CHESTER

Hazelton rang me up to tell me he hears Stetson has been pushed to the wall. It was kept out of the evening editions, but the morning papers will have it. (MRS. CHESTER *sits down again, staring ahead of her.)* It doesn't affect me.

WALL

A good fellow.

CHESTER

Yes, a mighty good fellow. A little too fond of going with the swell crowd. Good entertainer. But hardly a safe man. I am sorry for him. We have been friends for years.

MISS FLORRIWELL

It will be hardest on the wife.

ELKINS

They have been lavish spenders.

CHESTER

Well, it may prove the making of them.

MRS. CHESTER

Be charitable, John.

CHESTER

I'm charitable enough. All Stetson has had to do for the last fifteen years is to grind out dollars for his wife to spend. He has scraped and schemed summer and winter to keep her on the Riviera or out in California, and she has played ducks and drakes with his money. Considering what some women seem to expect of their husbands, it is a wonder to me that more of us don't land in the penitentiary.

MYRTLE

He's giving it to you, Mabel.

CHESTER

Mabel is a good wife. She has helped me, and she hasn't squandered what little I have made. (MRS. CHESTER'S *hand again goes to her heart.)* When our day comes we shall enjoy life together.

MISS FLORRIWELL

The spending woman is the natural result of the pampered woman. In time, American women will become the helpmeets of men, just as the French and German women are the helpmeets of their husbands to-day.

ELKINS

God bless the Elsas and Gretchens.

MRS. CHESTER

Is there no way of saving the Stetsons, John?

CHESTER

(lighting a cigarette)

Not that I can see. That's the way in business. Up to-day, down to-morrow.

WALL

The trouble is that when one goes down so many are dragged down with him.

ELKINS

Innocent people. I know. We lost our money that way.

CHESTER

Well, it's only business. The statistics show that seventy-seven and one-half per cent. of business ventures are failures. So far, I'm among the successful. But, then, I'm cautious, and Mabel isn't foolish.

MRS. CHESTER

Poor things! They will have to give up everything.

CHESTER

I doubt if Stetson saved anything. He made money, and his wife spent it. It is the American way, and those who do otherwise are the exceptions.

MISS FLORRIWELL

(to MYRTLE*)*

Now, dear, you see why I believe in woman's cause, in any move that will give a woman greater freedom. With freedom she will think; and when she thinks she will no longer drive the man she loves to the brink of desperation, nor will she endanger the fortunes of her children, in the gratification of her personal vanity.

MYRTLE

Our mothers were sane; the old ideals are my ideals.

MISS FLORRIWELL

But conditions have changed, Myrtle. Life was simpler years ago, and the men of those days had less to contend with. Wives were ornaments; but to-day they are no longer satisfied to be classed along with the bric-à-brac. They want to be of service—I am speaking of true women, of course; they want to make life better; they want to remove pitfalls from the paths of the children, and prove themselves mates for the men they love. The woman of curls and patches has disappeared, and men should be the last to want her back again.

ELKINS

And yet what an influence she exerted in her own quiet way. She was queen in the dining-room, mistress in the kitchen, and——

WALL

(interrupting)

Mother in the nursery, eh? No allowance being made in the architectural plans of the modern

flat for the nursery, I suppose it is our way of suggesting that motherhood is no longer considered proper.

MISS FLORRIWELL

Her influence was not always for good. Women knew that men considered them his inferior, and they took advantage of him whenever possible.

MYRTLE

And now?

MISS FLORRIWELL

And now that she is considered his equal she no longer takes advantage of him; she would work side by side with him for the good of the many.

MRS. CHESTER

I am still thinking of the Stetsons.

CHESTER

No use in worrying, Mabel. The piper has to be paid, you know. For a short whirl in society, many a family has had to live in penury. And I doubt if we shall ever learn by the folly of others.

WALL

You had no dealings with Stetson?

CHESTER

Never. We were good friends, but I always thought his methods too risky. About a month ago he wanted to use my Pennsylvanias, and offered a good premium. But I said no. I'm glad I was cautious.

WALL

Well, you are fortunate. Had you given them to him you would have been a poor man to-night.

[MRS. CHESTER *starts.*

MYRTLE

Don't talk of such a thing. It gives one the creeps.

ELKINS

You wouldn't get that electric, Mrs. Chester.

MISS FLORRIWELL

Or your trip abroad.

MRS. CHESTER

(pleadingly)

John is not the sort to be easily discouraged. Suppose we had lost everything, dear; suppose we were as poor as the Stetsons, would you care very much?

CHESTER

(irritably)

Hear the woman talk! What are we here for if not to play the game? And the stakes are success and money, aren't they? I've played the game, and I've been fairly successful. But one doesn't make a stake easily. Of course I'd care. So would you care when you had to cut out your luncheons and dinners, cut out theaters and pretty dresses, and live on next to nothing a week. Let's change the subject or I'll have a nightmare to-night.

MRS. CHESTER

(as if to herself).

Poor Mrs. Stetson. It's all so terrible.

[CHESTER *makes a gesture of irritability.*

MYRTLE

I wish the old days would come back.

ELKINS

Side curls and patches?

MYRTLE

Anything rather than this continuous battle called modern business.

WALL

Miss Myrtle is an idealist.

MISS FLORRIWELL

And perhaps it was intended we should be idealists. Some of us women still think so, and we are doing our best to make society saner. All over the world the cry is the same, and unless something is done there will be a swift ending of our civilization.

CHESTER

I don't see that women can change things much.

MISS FLORRIWELL

They have the interests of the nation as much at heart as have men. Give them the opportunity

and you will find them capable aids in securing honest legislation; enlarge the field of their activities and you will no longer see them wasting their time on bridge or social frivolity. An auto ride will no longer seem the most satisfactory way of spending an afternoon. The novel-reading woman is out of style; the card-playing woman is worse, and, to get rid of her, you must find useful and honorable occupation for her and her sisters.

MRS. CHESTER

Dear Ann, we are not all willing, neither are we all capable. What could I do, for instance?

MISS FLORRIWELL

There are more things than one a woman can do. If she is not interested in the things I am interested in, there is plenty else to keep her busy. And not the least useful thing a married woman can do is to raise her own sons and daughters that they develop into good Americans. A true mother should no more be willing to leave her children to the care of the nurse than her dinner to the choice of the cook.

ELKINS

Good for you, Miss Florriwell. Mrs. Chester knows that what you say is right; but, like the

rest of us, she likes to be reminded occasionally of the truth.

WALL

Modern society is no less a failure than was monasticism. The latter was incapable of action, and died a natural death; society never thinks, and is therefore doomed. But I doubt if it will ever be other than what it is.

ELKINS

The younger generation is coming along.

MYRTLE

And the younger generation is for progress.

WALL

How about the old ideals?

MYRTLE

They are good enough. It is only modern methods that are unsatisfactory.

MISS FLORRIWELL

And even the ideals are to be changed somewhat. Fifty years ago you would have had to sit silently

in a corner. Your article in the *Academy* would never have appeared. You would have played croquet instead of golf; Byron would have been your favorite author instead of Tolstoy. Where the ideals remain unchanged, progress is impossible.

MYRTLE

We mean one and the same thing, but we express our thoughts differently.

CHESTER

And, say what you will, life remains a pretty serious proposition. Especially married life. What do you young people know about it? Your bills are paid; for you there is no Servant Question, and you don't have to argue with the plumber or the gardener.

MYRTLE

(loftily)

When we do, perhaps we shall reason with them. There is a difference, you know, in the two methods.

WALL

It is good to be hopeful, anyhow. Youth is too enthusiastic; Age is too disgruntled. It is only the Man of Forty who sees life as it really is.

MRS. CHESTER

But a woman always sees it as it might be. Whether we are New Women, or just ordinary Women, we always retain the dream power. And we guard it as the virgins guarded the flame in the silent temples of Vesta.

MYRTLE

Quite a flight for Mabel!

CHESTER

But Mabel speaks like a true woman. Her ideas may not be yours, Myrtle, nor yours, Miss Florriwell; but fundamentally you all agree. My views of life are different from those of Henry; making money is apt to make one practical. Yet he and I agree when it comes to ethics, even if it is sometimes impossible for me to act according to my beliefs. You may not find Tennyson lying around an office; but if poets were the only readers of poetry and good literature, the publishers would soon be where our friends the Stet-

sons are. By Jove, it's too bad about them. I wish I could help him.

ELKINS

It takes brains to appreciate brains. Our men are shrewd enough to see the good in everything; and they have warm hearts.

MISS FLORRIWELL

That is why we feel sure of winning our fight. The American is the best man in the world. He knows that freedom and equality have made him what he is; have made America what it is. And he will be the last to deny that freedom and equality to his women. We have no fear of the outcome.

[*She rises.* MRS. CHESTER *and the men also rise.*

ELKINS

(enthusiastically)

You bet!

WALL

Miss Florriwell will let me see her to her door?

MISS FLORRIWELL

I came in my electric, but you can accompany me if you are going. *(To* MRS. CHESTER.*)* I only ran in for a minute, Mabel; and I had almost forgotten to tell you I have decided to leave for Sicily in a few days. The house will be closed while I am away. But I shall see you all again. I expect to be away fully six months.

[*While she is speaking,* WALL *whispers a few words to* MRS. CHESTER, *bows to* MYRTLE, *and then opens the door and goes out.* CHESTER *accompanies him, leaving* ELKINS, MYRTLE, MRS. CHESTER, *and* MISS FLORRIWELL *in the room.*

MRS. CHESTER

I shall miss you, Ann.

ELKINS

Miss Florriwell will spread American ideals in Sicily. Be sure you take the flag along with you, Miss Florriwell.

MYRTLE

And wave it occasionally.

MISS FLORRIWELL

Trust an American woman to do that, my dear. And when I get back I will tell you whether Tennyson was as true a prophet as he was poet, when he said that the old order changeth. I cannot imagine a Sicilian ever changing. Good-by, Mr. Elkins.

[*She moves to the door, accompanied by* MYRTLE *and* MRS. CHESTER, *whose arm is about her.* ELKINS *remains by the fireplace.*

MRS. CHESTER

I shall miss you very much. But the change will do you good. I hope we shall all be here when you return.

MISS FLORRIWELL

Of course you will, dear; how silly to think of such a thing.

[*The three women go out. A few seconds later,* MYRTLE *returns.*

MYRTLE

(goes over to ELKINS*)*

Oh, Henry! I can't tell you how glad I am.

ELKINS

Why? That she is going?

MYRTLE

About your success, of course. How dull some people are! You must be sleepy.

[*She takes a seat, while* ELKINS *stands over her.*

ELKINS

I knew. I was only teasing. Life begins on Monday. Just think! It's all ahead. Say, Myrtle, it's too bad about the Stetsons, isn't it? Sort of gives me the blues.

MYRTLE

Perhaps things will come out all right.

ELKINS

I guess not. Mabel seemed to be worrying too.

MYRTLE

She visited there a great deal. Personally, I don't care much for them. They are ostentatious people. And yet I'm sorry for Mrs. Stetson.

ELKINS

It's too bad that business so often ends that way. I guess Stetson had his "first day" once upon a time. He had his hopes and his ambitions; and even if he isn't exactly our kind, he is a human being. His wife was a girl once, like you, Myrtle; and they built their air castles just like the rest of us. I don't believe in the survival of the fittest doctrine. All should have our sympathy. When one fails, the progress of the race is hindered. Ghee! I'm sorry for him.

MYRTLE

You are a dear boy, Henry. I don't know why, but I feel it is going to affect us, too.

ELKINS

I don't see why. John doesn't owe him money. I know of quite a few, though, who invested their

all with him. The morning papers will be bad reading.

MYRTLE

But do you know what day it will be?

ELKINS

Your birthday, kid. No amount of bad news can spoil that day.

MYRTLE

(sighing)

I shall soon be ancient.

ELKINS

It was only yesterday I used to swing you! You aren't fully grown yet. You are a baby compared to me.

[CHESTER *and* MRS. CHESTER *enter.*

MYRTLE

Indeed! I like that.

MRS. CHESTER

Quarreling?

MYRTLE

Henry hasn't proper respect for my years. On the eve of my birthday, too.

[*They seat themselves, except* ELKINS, *who remains leaning over* MYRTLE'S *chair.*

CHESTER

Sit down, Henry, and have another cigarette.

ELKINS

No, I must be going. Shall I call for you in the morning, Myrtle?

MYRTLE

Miss Florriwell wants us to take lunch with her. Let us go to the Park first. I wonder what the Stetsons are doing. I wish I could help them.

CHESTER

Probably preparing an inventory of their things. I think everything was in his name.

MRS. CHESTER

She had property of her own.

CHESTER

Yes; but she made it over to him. I guess they will be dead broke this time. Something may turn up to save them, but it isn't likely. They will be poor.

ELKINS

(going to the door)

Well, good-night. Be glad you have a cautious husband, Mabel. Ghee! it must be hard to have had everything, and then lose it. I'd rather be poor from the beginning.

MYRTLE

Poverty isn't so bad if one has a clear conscience, is it, Henry? I never want to be one of the spenders.

CHESTER

Love in a cottage, eh, Myrtle?

MRS. CHESTER

Better that than worry in a palace.

ELKINS

Or in an apartment. I'm going.

[*As he opens the door,* MYRTLE *rises and follows him out.*

MRS. CHESTER

Did you get any particulars, John?

CHESTER

No. Hazelton merely said he had heard the news about seven o'clock, and that it wouldn't appear till to-morrow. But don't go worrying about it. We get used to that on 'Change. It's the see-saw that makes it so interesting. Nothing surprises me any more.

MRS. CHESTER

Would it be possible for you to lose your money, John?

CHESTER

No. I don't gamble. At least, I use good judgment. Stetson went for other people's cash like a wolf for the blood of unprotected sheep.

MRS. CHESTER

And they will be ruined?

CHESTER

Sure thing. It's like the game of Follow my Leader, only when the leader makes money he manages to keep it.

MRS. CHESTER

And you have managed to keep it?

CHESTER

Just so. I don't see why you are so worked up over the matter.

MRS. CHESTER

But suppose we lost our money?

CHESTER

Impossible. That block of Pennsylvania is enough to keep us in comfort, let alone what I make on the side.

MRS. CHESTER

But just suppose?

CHESTER

(testily)

Oh, you women are always supposing. Don't suppose anything of the sort. Every time you look at your diamonds in the safe, give the envelope marked "Pennsylvania" a pat, and—don't worry. Leave that to me.

[MYRTLE *enters. She gives* MRS. CHESTER *a white envelope.*

MYRTLE

As Henry was going, a messenger boy brought this for you, Mabel.

MRS. CHESTER

(looks at the inscription)

It is from Mrs. Stetson.

CHESTER

(lighting a cigar)

Probably wants to borrow a thousand.

[MRS. CHESTER *opens the envelope and reads.* CHESTER *takes up the newspaper;* MYRTLE *picks up a book and sits down in an armchair.*

MRS. CHESTER

(looking straight ahead of her)

No. She is coming to see me to-morrow. That is all she says.

(CURTAIN)

ACT III

Same as Act II. It is the following morning. Mrs. Chester *and* Wall *are seated on opposite sides of a table, on which there are a vase of long-stemmed roses and a few books.*

Mrs. Chester

I could not talk last night. I received your letter just as we were sitting down to dinner and, of course, I have been upset ever since.

Wall

The unpleasant is not calculated to—er—settle one's nerves.

Mrs. Chester

But this is so unexpected. I am sure I never promised Mrs. Morton to give her back the money at a moment's notice.

Wall

Probably not. But I presume that this trouble they are in has made it necessary for her to collect her debts. Five hundred dollars is a considerable sum, Mrs. Chester.

MRS. CHESTER

It never seemed so to me until now.

WALL

It is an extraordinarily large sum for a woman to lose at cards. Did you owe that much originally to one woman?

MRS. CHESTER

Oh, no! To half a dozen, and some of the debts were quite old. When I got my allowance, it was all needed for bills. Mrs. Morton had a lot of ready money; and I happened to tell her my debts were worrying me. She offered to lend me enough to clear me, and I asked for five hundred.

WALL

She must be a generous woman. Were there no strings to the loan?

MRS. CHESTER

I was to help her in a social way.

WALL

Ah! The old story. Will women ever learn that certain things are to be bought only at an exorbitant price?

MRS. CHESTER

I don't pretend to look at such things in a business light. And Mrs. Morton expects this money to be paid right away?

WALL

She certainly does. She claims you promised to repay it the next day. As you know, she has urgent need of the money.

MRS. CHESTER

So have I. I have nothing. I cannot pawn my jewels.

WALL

It is an embarrassing situation.

MRS. CHESTER

I have next to nothing in my bank. And I owe I don't know how much besides.

WALL

I would tell your husband.

MRS. CHESTER

No; it would—I—— He has trusted me in all things. If it were a small sum I wouldn't mind. But to tell him of this one debt will be to tell him of all the others.

WALL

They are large?

MRS. CHESTER

I must owe another five hundred. Small bills amount up so.

WALL

Still, I would make a clean breast of it to him. The bills must be paid.

MRS. CHESTER

I am allowed a hundred a month for myself, and in time I can settle them. But I can't pay Mrs. Morton. I haven't the money.

WALL

Then you must ask Chester for it. The Mortons are being pushed to the wall, and when people find themselves in that fix, they get ugly.

MRS. CHESTER

I'm not responsible for their troubles. I simply can't do it. I tell you he has trusted me so much. I have never had to ask him for anything. He has always been so generous with me. Too generous. He has always found a way to pay for things that I should have paid for. In such a delicate way. Oh! I see it all now. We women are like spoiled children. He has treated me like a woman, and I have been a foolish child; he made a companion of me when I wasn't worthy of it. *(She rises, and goes to the fireplace, and leans against the mantel.)* Oh! it is all wrong. One doesn't allow children to play with fire, or with razors. And that is what you men are doing with us to-day. We are not ready for it. I tell you we are not ready for it. And yet you men would give us dynamite if we asked for it. A woman is cautious only in one thing; and that is instinctive. I can't tell him. Not yet. You don't know all.

WALL

I know your husband well enough——

MRS. CHESTER

(interrupting)

No, no; that isn't it. I tell you he is too generous. But you don't know all. I can't tell him.

WALL

But this woman will make trouble for you.

MRS. CHESTER

Let it come; it's bound to come sooner or later. But I can't ask Chester to help me.

WALL

(making a gesture of impatience)

Inconsistency! No, pardon me, Mrs. Chester. I don't mean to be rude. I consider myself an old friend. But you are in a mess. You have borrowed this money, and it must be paid. If you haven't enough to repay it yourself, you must tell your husband. I am sufficiently acquainted with his circumstances to know that he will give it to you. He may scold you a little, but—pardon me again—I think you deserve it.

MRS. CHESTER

Oh! you don't know all. You don't know why I can't tell him. You don't know what I have done.

WALL

He may scold you a little. But it will be nothing to him. He has put his money into Pennsylvania bonds. They are negotiable, and——

MRS. CHESTER

(interrupting)

Oh! that's it! That's it!

WALL

(rising)

Why! what do you mean, Mrs. Chester?

MRS. CHESTER

I took them out of our strong-box, and loaned them to Mrs. Stetson the day before yesterday.

WALL

(horrified)

You gave the bonds to the Stetsons!

MRS. CHESTER

To Mrs. Stetson. She was to do me a favor; and in return I loaned her the bonds. Mr. Stetson was putting through a deal. She said they would not pass out of his hands. He would keep them in his safe, and they would enable him to do something or other—put this deal through, whatever it was.

WALL

And Chester?

MRS. CHESTER

He doesn't know. He thinks the bonds are in our strong-box. Now you know.

WALL

(sits down heavily)

Well, you have certainly done it. The Stetsons are probably bankrupts by this time.

MRS. CHESTER

(holding out her hand to him)

His name wasn't in the list. Isn't there hope?

WALL

One firm drags down another. Anyone connected with Wall Street lives over a mine which may explode at any minute. How could you do such a thing?

MRS. CHESTER

Oh! don't ask me. I was tempted. Our lives are beset with temptations. We only think of display and false position. It is all we live for. And Chester has trusted me, believed in me; held me up as a model wife, and been so generous. I tell you that a mistress would be more considerate of her protector's welfare than is many a wife!

WALL

Now, now, Mrs. Chester; please don't. This affair may end all right. You are terribly upset. Please take your seat again. I want to talk to you.

MRS. CHESTER

(seats herself opposite WALL*)*

I don't know what to do.

WALL

That is what I want to talk to you about.

[*There is a silence for fully half a minute, during which* MRS. CHESTER *drums with her fingers on the table, and exhibits other signs of nervousness.*

MRS. CHESTER

I suppose the end has come. I can do nothing.

WALL

No. Perhaps this may be the beginning.

MRS. CHESTER

It is the end.

WALL

Let us get the matter of the bonds straight first. It is the most serious.

MRS. CHESTER

Mrs. Morton's affair worries me most. The bonds are ours.

WALL

I suppose you know that they become the property of whoever happens to hold them?

MRS. CHESTER

(stunned)

I don't understand.

WALL

Bonds are negotiable and non-negotiable.

MRS. CHESTER

I still don't understand.

WALL

(slowly)

I mean that certain bonds cannot be transferred without the signature of their owner; other bonds, the negotiable bonds, are like gold. As I said before, Chester's bonds were the negotiable kind.

MRS. CHESTER

But you don't think Mr. Stetson has sold them? Mrs. Stetson promised me they wouldn't pass out of his possession.

WALL

Women's promises are not always to be depended on, Mrs. Chester. I don't want to frighten you, but—well, men are weak, too, you know. And——

MRS. CHESTER

(interrupting)

Oh, my God! The whole thing is awful.

[*She starts to get up, but* WALL *motions her to keep her seat.*

WALL

We must just consider it possible that Stetson has negotiated them. We don't know that he has done so; but there is always the possibility. You had a key to your husband's strong-box?

MRS. CHESTER

Yes. I keep my jewels there.

WALL

Then he can't claim that you——

MRS. CHESTER

(interrupting)

Stole them? Oh, spare me that.

WALL

(paying no attention to her)

In a way, I suppose, it was wrong of him to have put them there. You are no business woman, and it was certainly putting temptation in anyone's way.

MRS. CHESTER

It was in mine. I had no idea of their value to anyone but my husband.

WALL

I merely asked the question because, supposing the bonds to have been negotiable, if Chester could prove that they were taken without his knowledge or consent, he might be able to recover them. But I fear that he would have no case as things stand. Your having a key to the box would be considered equivalent to a recognition on his part of your part ownership of the contents. We had better communicate immediately with Mrs. Stetson.

MRS. CHESTER

She will be here directly. She sent me a note last night saying she wanted to see me.

WALL

Then we need not inform Chester of the affair until we have seen her. Things may be better than I surmise.

MRS. CHESTER

Oh! I am sure of it. Mrs. Stetson would not tell me an untruth.

WALL

We will hope not. Now let us get down to the other matter, the money you owe Mrs. Morton.

MRS. CHESTER

Will this morning never end?

WALL

You should have thought of this morning many days ago. When women think of consequences of trivial actions there will be fewer tragedies in the lives of men—and in their own. But, there!

I don't want to preach, Mrs. Chester. I want to help you. I want to do something for you.

MRS. CHESTER

I don't see how you can.

WALL

You must be out of Mrs. Morton's hands by this afternoon.

MRS. CHESTER

Well?

WALL

If this bond matter hadn't occurred, I would have insisted on you telling your husband of your debt before I left this room. It would have been the only way. But he will have worries enough now. This money must be paid to Mrs. Morton, and you must let me advance it to you.

MRS. CHESTER

(starting)

Oh, no, Mr. Wall. I cannot do that.

WALL

(coldly)

You must let me advance this money to you, and you must satisfy Mrs. Morton. She is not the kind to whom you can owe money.

MRS. CHESTER

But—— Oh, Mr. Wall! You are very kind, but I cannot accept this from you.

WALL

I shall insist upon it. *(He puts his hand in his coat pocket and extracts a wallet, and smilingly continues.)* See! I came prepared!

MRS. CHESTER

Oh, no! You are very good. But I cannot let you do this for me. I cannot accept money from you. I got myself into trouble, and I must get myself out of it.

WALL

Let me turn this *(holding up the wallet)* over to Mrs. Morton. You will oblige me.

[*He lays the wallet on the table; rises, smells the roses, and extracts one of them from the vase.*

MRS. CHESTER

Oh! Please don't press the matter. I cannot do it, Mr. Wall.

WALL

(smelling the rose)

Women are just flowers to me, Mrs. Chester; something to be taken care of and protected by all decent men. I have never plucked or harmed one wantonly. You can use this money *(he lays the rose in front of her)* without fear.

MRS. CHESTER

I—I am sure of it, Mr. Wall. I appreciate very much what you would do. But I shall come out of it somehow or other.

WALL

I do not see how, unless you ask Chester for the money. And it is possible that——

[*He hesitates.*

MRS. CHESTER

That we may be ruined, you mean?

WALL

Exactly.

MRS. CHESTER

Oh! oh! It is terrible.

[*She covers her face with her hands.* WALL *replaces the wallet in his pocket, walks over to the window, and looks out. He speaks with his back turned to her.*

WALL

Look here, Mrs. Chester. You must take this money; or, rather, let me turn it over to Mrs. Morton for you. The debt must be off your shoulders. Oh! *(He holds aside the curtain.)* Mrs. Stetson is leaving her house. She is coming this way, and on foot. *(He turns around, but as* MRS. CHESTER'S *back is turned to him, she cannot see him. He speaks hurriedly.)* Look here, you can take it, and forget it until you can repay it. I have been your friend for years; I have been Chester's friend. *(*MRS. CHESTER *picks up the rose.)* I have eaten his bread. I have something of the Arab in me; my friend is not to be taken advantage of. You must please accept this money. I can afford it.

MRS. CHESTER

(turning so as to see him)

I think you are very generous.

WALL

You and Chester have both helped me in ways I cannot explain. You have taken me into your home. And—you will let me do this for you, will you?

MRS. CHESTER

I will. *(She turns from him.)* God knows when I shall repay you.

[*She puts the rose to her lips.*

WALL

(still standing by the window)

Mrs. Stetson will be here in a minute. You will soon know everything. If the bonds are safe there will be no need of my aid. Chester may give you a scolding, and that will be all. But, look here! I want you to promise one thing. Will you?

MRS. CHESTER

(after a pause of several seconds)

What is it?

WALL

Cut out playing cards for money. However small the stakes, one is apt to get beyond one's depth. And if it's dangerous for a man, it is doubly so for a woman. Will you promise?

MRS. CHESTER

I promise. This has been a lesson to me.

[*Enter* ERMINIE. MRS. CHESTER *lays down the rose.* WALL *remains by the window.*

ERMINIE

Mrs. Stetson, ma'am.

[MRS. STETSON *enters.* ERMINIE *retires, and closes door.*

MRS. STETSON

(advancing to embrace MRS. CHESTER, *who has risen)*

My dear! I wished to speak to you. Oh! I am a very wretched woman.

MRS. CHESTER

(consoling her)

No, no! Don't talk like that, Mrs. Stetson. Mr. Wall is here.

WALL

(bowing to MRS. STETSON*)*

Perhaps I had better retire, Mrs. Chester?

MRS. STETSON

No, no! Please remain, Mr. Wall. Perhaps you can help me. *(*WALL *places a chair for her, and they all seat themselves.)* You have heard the news, both of you?

WALL

Nothing authentic, Mrs. Stetson. Your husband is not badly involved, is he?

MRS. STETSON

Oh! gone, gone; everything is gone. I knew very little of his affairs; nothing, in fact. But he telephoned me an hour ago, saying he was pushed to the wall, and that everything is gone.

MRS. CHESTER

But our bonds, Mrs. Stetson? They are safe, aren't they?

MRS. STETSON

(covering her face)

Oh! my dear; how can I tell you?

MRS. CHESTER

But you said—you promised——

MRS. STETSON

Oh! it's awful. Stetson was so confident he was going to put some deal through. If stocks went up he could have done so. He used the bonds, thinking he would treble his money and buy them back in a few hours.

MRS. CHESTER

Oh!

MRS. STETSON

(with a gesture of despair)

We are ruined; and we have ruined you. Stetson only knew it a little while ago. He has been trying to get your husband over the 'phone. He told me he would come home for a couple of hours, and try to catch your husband here at lunch time. He is almost distracted. I fear he will kill himself.

MRS. CHESTER

But, Mrs. Stetson, you said the bonds were not to pass out of Mr. Stetson's hands!

MRS. STETSON

I didn't know. He told me—— Oh, child, pity me! I am heartbroken. I am so ashamed, so ashamed!

WALL

Pardon me, Mrs. Stetson, are you sure these bonds have passed out of Mr. Stetson's possession?

MRS. STETSON

(covering her face)

Yes, they went to Morton.

MRS. CHESTER

Oh, my God!

WALL

A broker whose methods have always been questionable.

MRS. STETSON

Mr. Stetson has had dealings with him for years. He thought him honorable.

WALL

Well, he is said to be bankrupt now. And you say your own money is gone?

MRS. STETSON

Everything. *(To* MRS. CHESTER.*)* Oh, my dear! I can't ask you to forgive me. But don't judge me harshly. If Stetson lives through it he will pay your husband every penny. I know he will. My money has all gone with his; but I shall help him if I can. Oh! I will do everything, anything.

MRS. CHESTER

(won over by her distress)

Yes, you must be brave now. You must encourage Mr. Stetson. We have paid the price. It is very hard, but perhaps some good will come of it. God help us all.

MRS. STETSON

Our engagements, of course, are all off. I have written to the Ambassador, and the few who were to have come to the dinner. The papers will inform the others. It is all terrible! It is all my fault. If women only knew how their extravagances imperil those nearest and dearest to them, society might become saner.

WALL

Well, the first thing we must do is to get hold of your husband, Mrs. Chester. He must be told about this bond transaction right away.

MRS. STETSON

I dare not meet him. Oh! it is so terrible to have done wrong. It burns like fire. I shall never rest until this money is repaid. And even then the wrong will still have been done. One does not shake off the responsibility for one's ill deeds by merely paying cash.

WALL

It is a pity more people do not think so.

MRS. CHESTER

Do not think about this any more, Mrs. Stetson, until we have told Chester. I am equally culpable. Perhaps Mr. Stetson can do something. Chester usually gets home about this time. Would you like Mr. Wall to see you home, or would you prefer to stay here?

MRS. STETSON

(as WALL *rises)*

Oh! I will remain here. I must tell him myself. I am a wretched woman.

WALL

Well, I had better go down town. I will see your husband before he leaves his office, Mrs. Chester. It will be as well to prepare him, if he hasn't heard of the transaction. I will also attend to that other matter. When you see Stetson, Mrs. Stetson, cheer him up. There's a bright side to everything if we only try to find it. Stockbrokers expect reverses; a few days, and they are on their feet again, you know. We must see what can be done.

MRS. STETSON

Oh! nothing can be done when it is too late. The price has to be paid. And the innocent always suffer.

[*The door opens, and* CHESTER *enters. He is smiling, showing that he is entirely unconscious of any change in his fortunes. He nods to* WALL, *and his wife, but goes directly to where* MRS. STETSON *is seated.*

CHESTER

Now, now, Mrs. Stetson. This is a terrible blow. But we must see what can be done. Stet-

son and I are old friends, you know, and reverses will never alter things between us.

MRS. STETSON

(dazed)

Oh! you have heard?

CHESTER

Why! Everyone is talking about it. I was out all the morning, or I would have rung up your husband and cheered him up. What's a friend for if he can't do that?

[MRS. CHESTER *rises. She leans against her chair, watching her husband, as if eager to speak, and yet afraid.*

WALL

I was just going down town to hunt you up.

CHESTER

Stay to lunch instead. We must try to get Stetson.

MRS. CHESTER

But, John——!

CHESTER

(interrupting)

That's all right, Mabel. Here's our friend, Mrs. Stetson, with us. Crying, too. We must cheer them both up. *(Looks at his watch.)* And I have something to say to your husband, Mrs. Stetson, which may make him feel better. I have done a lot of thinking this morning.

MRS. STETSON

(wonderingly)

And you know everything?

CHESTER

Everything; and I sympathize warmly with you.

MRS. STETSON

I was afraid to face you.

MRS. CHESTER

Dear Mrs. Stetson! She has suffered so much.

MRS. STETSON

I was ashamed to enter your house, to meet your wife.

CHESTER

Now, Mrs. Stetson! Mabel is not that sort, and neither am I. Reverses come to all of us, and that's what brings out the true man and true woman in us. We have known each other—why! I hate to say how many years—all of us in this room. You, Mabel, and Wall here, all remember the day when we didn't have so very much, eh? We got along well enough then. The money, or the loss of it, makes no difference.

WALL

That's the fine way of looking at it, old man.

MRS. CHESTER

(proudly)

It's John's way.

MRS. STETSON

Oh! I can't believe it.

CHESTER

Nonsense! These things are sent to us to bring out the best in us. Perhaps it is the good God's way of bringing us closer to one another. Just think of it! Here we are for a few short

years. We hope, and plan, and build; and then something knocks the structure to the ground, and we mourn amid the ashes. Is that the time for a man's friends to forsake him? Never. Would you turn against Mabel and me just because we were poor? Never. And if everyone would only help each other, stand by each other in just such times as this, what a happy place the world would be!

MRS. CHESTER

Brave John!

MRS. STETSON

Oh, Mr. Chester! It was all my fault. Don't blame Richard. He did everything for my sake; to make me richer, to buy me jewels, to let me take a higher place in society. Don't blame him. It was all my fault.

CHESTER

No, no; we won't blame anyone.

WALL

Society itself is to blame, Mrs. Stetson.

MRS. STETSON

I am to blame. The individual is responsible. *(To* CHESTER.*)* But don't blame Richard. You are so good, but all is over for us. You are so kind.

CHESTER

Nonsense. Now I am going to ring up your husband. He must be home by this time. *(Looks at his watch.)* It is half-past twelve.

[*While the others remain silent, he goes out, closing the door. After a pause of a few seconds, the door is opened, and* ERMINIE *enters.*

ERMINIE

Lunch will be ready in a quarter of an hour, ma'am. Will there be guests?

MRS. CHESTER

Yes, Erminie. Mr. and Mrs. Stetson and Mr. Wall will be with us. Miss Myrtle will not be here. Leave the door open, please.

[ERMINIE *goes out, leaving the door open.* CHESTER'S *voice is plainly heard.* WALL *and* MRS.

CHESTER *look at one another.* MRS. STETSON *leans forward, as if listening intently.*

CHESTER

Ah! Is that you, Stetson? No, no; not a word now. Your wife is over here. Yes, yes; I know everything. But not a word now. Come over right away. We are waiting for you. I have something to say to you both. You will come? Very well.

MRS. STETSON

He doesn't know!

[CHESTER *enters the room. He stands beside his wife.*

CHESTER

There! That is settled. I guess he was glad to get away from down town. *(To* MRS. CHESTER.*)* Is Myrtle in?

MRS. CHESTER

No. She and Henry went out to the Park, and were to take lunch with Miss Florriwell later.

CHESTER

I suppose Henry and Myrtle will be leaving us before long. Sit down, Wall.

[*Both men take seats.*

MRS. STETSON

Oh! Mr. Chester, do you really know all? Do you——

CHESTER

(interrupting)

Everything, my dear Mrs. Stetson.

WALL

Mrs. Stetson is worrying——

CHESTER

(inierrupting again)

I know. But don't let us discuss the matter until Stetson is here. Mrs. Stetson, let me see you take off your hat. Then you will feel that you are at home. *(*CHESTER *rises.)* Just to oblige me. *(*MRS. STETSON *removes her hat, which* CHESTER *takes from her, placing it on a chair at the end of the room.)* There! Now we won't discuss the subject till Stetson arrives. I feel

better to-day than I have ever felt before. *(The others look wonderingly at each other.)* Mabel, if you felt like I do, you wouldn't need a trip to Europe.

MRS. CHESTER

I want no more trips to Europe, John.

MRS. STETSON

Reverses make new women of us, truly New Women.

CHESTER

And, perhaps, my dear lady, these reverses teach us that fundamentally all women are good. And I know fundamentally all men are good. Thank God! I have the opportunity to prove it.

WALL

How, old man?

CHESTER

That is my secret. Even Mabel *(he strokes his wife's cheek)* does not know it.

MRS. CHESTER

(passionately)

You don't know what——

CHESTER

(interrupting)

Not a word, dear, until Stetson comes. He will be here directly. I feel like a man who has awakened from a long sleep, a sleep of nightmares. Wall, did you ever stop to consider that we are living a life of pretense and sham? The more we pretend, the more we pile on the sham, the greater the harm we do our fellow-men, and the greater the harm we do ourselves.

WALL

I think you said last night it was all in the game?

CHESTER

Yes, but I was blind then. I didn't know. It is amazing how clearly a man can see the right when once he takes the trouble to open his eyes. It is only since this morning that I know what it means to be my brother's keeper. My life has

been three parts sham. I have thought only of myself. I have feathered my nest, as they say. I have called myself a Christian; gone to church on Sundays, and forgotten my fellow-men the rest of the week. *(He addresses* Mrs. Stetson.*)* Mrs. Stetson, since this morning my eyes have been opened and, thank God! I am blind no longer. Ah! here he comes.

[Stetson *enters, looking haggard and hunted. He is picking at his fingernails. He looks hurriedly at those present, then his eyes rest on* Chester *as if fascinated by him. He stops picking at his nails, and his left hand moves nervously to his mouth, then to the lapels of his coat, then back to his mouth. He takes a few steps forward, and stops irresolutely. The others are all facing him, except* Mrs. Stetson, *who is looking away.*

Mrs. Chester

Oh!

CHESTER

(going forward heartily, with his hand outstretched)

Stetson, old friend, I am glad to see you.

STETSON

(putting his hand half forward, then withdrawing it, and speaking with irresolution)

You—you want to—to see me?

CHESTER

Give me your hand. You needn't be afraid of me, of Mabel. This makes no difference between us. Give me your hand!

STETSON

(gives him his hand)

I did not know you had heard all. I have been trying to 'phone you all morning.

CHESTER

Bad news travels quickly. If men would only report the other man's successes instead of his failures, it would be much better.

STETSON

I—I am ashamed to stand in the same room with you and your wife.

CHESTER

(placing a hand on his shoulder)

It will take more than loss of money to make us forget years of friendship.

STETSON

But I'm a criminal!

CHESTER

That has to be proved to me. You are worried.

STETSON

No. I know what I am. But, Chester, don't think she *(pointing to his wife, who all this time has been staring at the floor)* had anything to do with it. I am to blame. I misled her. I told her——

CHESTER

(interrupting)

You did what every man is doing—let her have all she wanted, and tried to make more for her.

MRS. CHESTER

(as STETSON *looks blankly from one to the other)*

Mrs. Stetson has told me, Mr. Stetson. I know all.

CHESTER

And Mabel hasn't turned against you, has she? Of course not. I tell you, Stetson, there are moments when a man, even a business man, feels that God is right close to him, right here! *(He strikes his heart.)* And that moment has come to me. Look! I'm rich; *(*STETSON *starts back in horror)* I'm wealthy. And that wealth——

MRS. STETSON

(rising and interrupting)

Oh! Mr. Chester, don't you know?

MRS. CHESTER

(at the same instant that MRS. STETSON *speaks, and as* WALL *rises)*

John! John!

CHESTER

(continuing, as if unaware of the interruptions)

And with that money, Stetson, I want to help you. It's all in bonds, as good as gold. We are

old friends, and I'm not going to see you go down for lack of money. Let them call us money-makers, but we have hearts! That's why I brought you over here. *(*Stetson *raises his hands to interrupt him, but* Chester *continues.)* I guess you would do the same for us. Look! We've been on the wrong track; living for money we have come to consider money a god. We have worshiped it. But it's never too late to begin life anew. And with my help, and your wife's help, you are going to begin anew, live a simpler life, a finer life. I am going to get my bonds out of our box, and, knowing you are safe, we will all break bread together and ask God, perhaps for the first time, to bless us and forgive us!

Stetson

(almost screaming with emotion)

My God! Chester. Don't you know what I have done? Your bonds are——

Chester

(interrupting and falling back)

What?

STETSON

(throwing out his hands)

I have used your bonds. I thought you knew. I tried to tell you. I have stolen your wealth.

MRS. CHESTER

(as her husband appears dazed)

It was my fault, John!

CHESTER

I—I don't understand.

MRS. STETSON

Oh, Mr. Chester! I prevailed on this girl to lend me your bonds for a few days. I gave them to my husband. They are gone, along with our wealth. You are ruined.

STETSON

I did it, I tell you. The women are not to blame. I deceived my own wife.

CHESTER

What is this, Mabel? I am stunned. I—I don't seem to understand.

STETSON

It was all my fault. I persuaded my wife to get the bonds from Mabel. She was to introduce her to some top-notchers at our house. I told my wife the bonds would remain in my possession, and that Morton and I were about to put through a big deal. I borrowed money on the bonds, thinking to buy them back in a few days. But stocks went flat, and the deal has fallen through. I've lost everything.

CHESTER

And my bonds? Wall, did you know of this?

WALL

Only an hour ago.

STETSON

I tell you I am the only one to blame. Your bonds are gone, and I'm a bankrupt. I can't reclaim them. I'm worse; I'm a thief. All I can do is to——

[*He puts his hand quickly into his hip pocket, draws a gun, and would shoot himself; but* CHESTER *springs forward and holds his wrist.*

CHESTER

Stetson!

STETSON

(struggling to free his hand)

For God's sake, let go!

CHESTER

No, no! *(With his other hand he takes the gun away from* STETSON, *and then releases him.* MRS. CHESTER *has risen, and receives the gun from her husband. All have started forward.)* Good God, man! What would you do?

STETSON

(wiping sweat from his brow with his sleeve)

I am a thief, and I have ruined you.

CHESTER

(brokenly, and after a pause)

We have paid the price. *(His voice grows stronger.)* Stetson, I brought you here to help you. Please God, I have done so. We are brothers. We were all going to begin anew, weren't we?

[*Puts his hand on* STETSON's *shoulder.*

STETSON

I am only a thief.

CHESTER

We are fellow-men. Lord! Lord! When I think of the temptations around us, and how society worships the successful and pushes the unsuccessful into the black pits of despair, I wonder that more of us don't fall. We are still rich. You have your wife; I have Mabel. Let this other matter be forgotten. We will begin anew.

STETSON

But I shall always be the man who has made you poor.

CHESTER

You will always be the man who has made me see clearly. You will be the man who has helped me do right, who has helped me save my soul. We are the instruments God uses to bring about perfection in His own way. You have helped me, Stetson. Come! Let me help you, too.

[*Holds out his hand.*

STETSON

And the world, Chester? The world?

CHESTER

The few we know, you mean. Why, Stetson, nobody knows of this save *(he suggests by a wave of his hand those present)* ourselves. And we have decided to forget. All that we are to remember is that we are old friends, have been through danger together. Every time the sun shines on a wakened world God opens a new account with it. I never knew it before, but I know it now.

MRS. CHESTER

Life has become suddenly serious and beautiful. You have shown me the way, John.

STETSON

You have shown me the way, Chester. God forgive me for what I have done, and for what I would have done. I'm a man again now. I owe you everything. I'll repay you yet in part, but only in part.

MRS. STETSON

No man can say what he owes to his friend. It is only God who can give him the adequate credit.

CHESTER

There! there! Nothing of all this to the young people. Mabel, it is surely lunch time?

STETSON

(looking at CHESTER*)*

I can't grasp it all yet. Man, you don't know what you have done for me. She *(pointing to his wife)* knows. Perhaps she will tell you some day.

CHESTER

Well, let's hope we get to know our true selves better. That's what we live for, and to do what good we can. We will pull through somehow. Let us all meet to-night in your home, perhaps for the last time. *(Trying to laugh.)* The simple life must begin in tiny flats, you know.

STETSON

(holding out his arms to CHESTER*)*

My God! I understand now.

CHESTER

(goes to MRS. STETSON *and leads her to her husband)*

There! We have years ahead of us. Let us seek for the beautiful things we have overlooked. *(He crosses to* MABEL, *and puts his arm around her.* WALL *remains between the two couples.)* Mabel, I have done right, haven't I, dear heart?

MRS. CHESTER

Oh, John! John! Can you forgive me?

CHESTER

There is nothing to forgive, child. It is all forgotten.

MRS. STETSON

Except the old friendship, Mr. Chester.

WALL

And the new vow.

[*Enter* ERMINIE.

ERMINIE

Lunch is ready, ma'am.

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV

Same as Act I. It is evening of the same day. The voices of Stetson *and* Chester *are heard indistinctly in the adjoining room, as if the men lingered over the dinner-table.* Elkins *and* Myrtle *are alone in the drawing-room. She is seated in an armchair; he is standing by the fire-place and, as the conversation commences, he throws away the cigarette he has been smoking.*

Elkins

Well, it's a big smash-up. I knew nothing about it till we sat down to dinner. Stetson was bound to go sooner or later; but I always thought John was well fixed and safe.

Myrtle

I can't understand it myself. And John is so fine through it all. I always said our American men are the best.

Elkins

He is one of them, certainly. If I had a pile of money, and lost it overnight, I'd feel pretty sore. I'd want to bite someone.

MYRTLE

You are so ferocious, aren't you, Henry?

ELKINS

I would be if I lost my money.

MYRTLE

Oh! you are as bad as the rest of them. You see what has become of their *(pointing to the adjoining room)* money. It vanishes overnight. If it brings happiness, it also brings sorrow. Money is so little, after all.

ELKINS

But it establishes friendly relations between us and the butcher, and baker, and——

MYRTLE

(interrupting)

Candlestick-maker. Fiddlesticks! What have you to do with the butcher and baker?

ELKINS

(pointedly)

Nothing at present, but I may have aspirations that way.

MYRTLE

Indeed! This is getting interesting. Are you going to run a boarding-house on the side? Perhaps we may become your first boarders. These days *(looking around the room)* are over now. We give up our place at the end of the month.

ELKINS

Shall you regret it all very much, Myrtle?

MYRTLE

Regret what?

ELKINS

Giving up so much comfort? Judging by what Chester says, and Stetson, too, they are going in for the Simple Life with a vengeance.

MYRTLE

Why, no! Show has never appealed to me, Henry. And I'm able to earn quite a nice sum with my pen, too. Some girls seem to forget that their parents didn't begin life with all the luxuries. *(Enthusiastically.)* Oh! I'm really glad. Mabel always laughs at my little checks for five and ten dollars; and even when that last one came for a

hundred—think of it, Henry, a hundred dollars! —she said it would barely suffice for a new dress. I think it is a greater sin for rich people to squander money than it is for poor people to steal it.

ELKINS

Well, Mabel thinks so now. A woman is made or marred by the set she travels with. But those days are over, and now you are just Myrtle Duncan, who is going to become famous and——

MYRTLE

(interrupting)

But still the same Myrtle. And life is beginning for you, too, Henry. No more idling; no more lovely walks out to the Park in the golden morning.

ELKINS

With the swans waiting to be fed.

MYRTLE

And the children sailing boats on the lake.

ELKINS

I guess we've tramped every inch of the walks. I remember the first time I took you out there. You were just so high *(indicates with his hand)*. We were both children then.

MYRTLE

We used to pretend it was the forest of Arden. And when we saw a policeman we pretended he was an ogre.

ELKINS

We always hated to turn back into the Avenue. It made me feel blue this morning to think it might be the last time.

MYRTLE

Do you remember the fireflies? You used to tell me that they were the lamps the fairies carried so as to see if the flowers were going to sleep.

ELKINS

I know. And do you remember how the deer used to feed out of your hand?

MYRTLE

And the squirrels? I wonder what Bunny will do without us? He seemed so fond of you.

ELKINS

So fond of you, Myrtle. Especially as you always had something in your pocket for him.

MYRTLE

Ah! The dream pocket.

ELKINS

That's what you always called it. And you have never told me why. Tell me, Myrtle!

MYRTLE

(shaking her head very slowly)

No.

ELKINS

(leaving the fireplace, and leaning over the table, looking at her)

Tell me, Myrtle!

MYRTLE

(still shaking her head)

Not yet.

ELKINS

Tell me!

MYRTLE

You'd only laugh.

ELKINS

No, I won't. Tell me!

MYRTLE

(looking down)

I called it the dream pocket because I kept all sorts of dream things in it.

ELKINS

Dream things?

MYRTLE

Things I used to dream over—a moss rosebud; a little silver pencil, and an—an old Japanese charm.

ELKINS

Why, Myrtle! I gave you one—the little God of Good Fortune with his rice bales. And I gave you a silver pencil *(*MYRTLE *nods her head quickly);* and I picked a moss rose for you once when we were out at the Bronx. And you said you would keep it always for remembrance.

MYRTLE

It is all dried up, but I still have it.

ELKINS

That was a year ago.

MYRTLE

It seems like yesterday.

ELKINS

I remember that trip so well, Myrtle. I think you were afraid of the buffalo. And I remember picking that rosebud for you, and wondering if anyone saw me. I say, Myrtle—— *(Laughter is heard in the adjoining room.* ELKINS *pauses, and then moves and stands beside her, with one hand on the back of her chair.)* Say, Myrtle,

we've had some awfully good times together, haven't we?

MYRTLE

(quietly)

Some good times, Henry.

ELKINS

I hate to think this morning may have been our last.

MYRTLE

There will be other mornings, Henry; Sundays —and holidays! We are going to be workers now.

ELKINS

(nervously)

You know, you've been so good to me that you've sort of spoilt me.

MYRTLE

You never seemed spoilt to me, Henry.

ELKINS

Well, you have. Because—because, well, it seems now as if I just can't do without you,

Myrtle. Especially now that life is really beginning.

MYRTLE

(looking straight ahead of her)

We shall always be good friends, Henry. I'm beginning, too; and I wouldn't like to think the old friendship was to be broken.

ELKINS

I didn't mean that. I'm afraid to say what I want to. What I want *(he drops on one knee beside the chair, so as to bring his face on a level with hers)* is you, Myrtle. I've always wanted you. I love you.

[MYRTLE *moves her head slowly so as to be able to look into his face.*

MYRTLE

(after a pause of several seconds)

Are you sure, Henry? Life is going to offer you so much.

ELKINS

I love you, Myrtle. And I want life to offer me much, and I want to accomplish much just for your sake, just so that you can keep on believing

in me. I want you beside me, to remind me of the fine; I want to be beside you to help you and sympathize with you and encourage you. There is so much to be done. And I want to help you do your share, because you are no idle woman; and I want to do things myself; to become somebody. But I can't do anything without you, Myrtle. I love you.

MYRTLE

(leaning slowly to him and kissing him)

And I love you, Henry.

ELKINS

(after a pause)

It—it wasn't so very difficult, Myrtle.

MYRTLE

What, Henry?

ELKINS

To tell you I loved you.

MYRTLE

That's because you really loved me.

ELKINS

From the very first, Myrtle. I've thought of you while I've been working. It seems as if I've always thought of you. I've got all sorts of little odds and ends of yours. Sometimes I'd take them out and look at them. You don't know what you've done for me; what you've kept me away from.

MYRTLE

And you have always been my knight, Henry. Always my Launcelot.

ELKINS

I think there is an angel in the room, Myrtle.

MYRTLE

It is the spirit of my mother, Henry. She died when I was still a child.

[*They are silent for some seconds.* HENRY *draws her fingers to his lips.*

ELKINS

She will be with us till the end. She knows that my life is consecrated to you. She will hear

us whisper our dreams to each other, and will pray to God for our happiness.

MYRTLE

Ah! we shall never be happier than now. It is consecration's moment.

ELKINS

(raising his head, and looking at her)

But we must prolong it throughout eternity.

[*The voices are heard again in the adjoining room.*

MYRTLE

They are so brave!

ELKINS

They don't know how happy we are.

MYRTLE

But they are happy, too. I don't know why, but I feel that John has done a great deed. Life is beginning for us. It is our day. And it is beginning for them as well.

ELKINS

And it is all so beautiful. We have nothing to fear. We will try to do our work well, fight the good fight, remembering that others are fighting side by side with us, and that all is for the best. And often, on such an evening as this, when we consider what progress we have made, you will find me kneeling beside you, and we will re-live the old dream.

MYRTLE

And so remain ever young. I don't think God intended we should ever grow old.

ELKINS

He wants us to be lovers always.

MYRTLE

Because, being lovers, we shall always be as children, happy and pure.

ELKINS

May I always be worthy of you, Myrtle.

MYRTLE

(kissing his forehead)

I love you, Henry.

[*While she is speaking, women's voices are heard approaching.* ELKINS *lifts* MYRTLE'S *fingers to his lips, and rises, standing by her chair.* MRS. STETSON *and* MRS. CHESTER *enter through the vestibule, conversing. They come forward, and* MYRTLE *rises.*

MRS. STETSON

(dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief)

And while we have been saying good-by to my bric-à-brac, what have you been doing?

ELKINS

Shall we tell them, Myrtle?

[MYRTLE *nods her head.*

MRS. CHESTER

I know! *(Kisses* MYRTLE.*)* I can tell by your face.

ELKINS

(taking MYRTLE'S *hand)*

Yes. She loves me. I am awfully happy.

MYRTLE

(leaning to him)

And so am I.

MRS. STETSON

(drawing MYRTLE *to her, and kissing her)*

Happy lovers! With to-morrow's dawn the birds will sing a new song for you—the song of love. It is the best song, after all; it begins at the cradle, and happy are they that hear it until the last clod of earth is thrown upon a grave. It glorifies the humble cottage surrounded by the modest flowers of the country; it sanctifies the gloomy tenement where we perceive only poverty and squalor; it humanizes the palace where we see nothing but ceremony, insincerity, and show. The birds love because they sing; and they sing because they always love. If we could only learn of them that one truth, if we could only remember that at heart every man is a lover, every woman a sweetheart, existence would be easier and life more beautiful. It is the young who are wise;

for they live in the blessed republic of love, which is the kingdom of heaven; and they think of nothing beyond its confines. The veil is lifted for them, and they see beyond. Happy are they who, when the curtain falls again, can remember the glory and the sweet voices that whispered to them in the silence.

[*She kisses* MYRTLE.

ELKINS

We heard them, didn't we, Myrtle?

MRS. STETSON

And you must try to hear them always. And you must often think back to this evening, Henry. Never forget that the one whom you have won is human, and always in need of love and sympathy and service; but remember also she is close to the Divine. Guard her as you would a priceless pearl. Though she is your wife, think of her as your sweetheart, as the girl by whose side you knelt but a little while ago. And, above all things, do not forget that some day you will have to surrender her to God, that she may stand, white as flame, with the other pure women yon side the grave. It is only the pure in heart that know what home and heaven are.

ELKINS

(stepping forward and grasping her hand)

Mrs. Stetson!

MRS. STETSON

There! There! Take your girl, and cherish her.

[*While she is speaking, the voices in the adjoining room are raised; the door opens, and* STETSON *and* CHESTER *enter.* MRS. STETSON *and* MRS. CHESTER *take seats;* ELKINS *and* MYRTLE *remain standing, in conversation.*

STETSON

Ah! Here they are. Well, Mrs. Chester, you have seen all our pretty things for the last time. They will soon be the property of others.

MRS. CHESTER

They have given you pleasure; let the others enjoy them. There are more beautiful things in the world, and before long you will be able to collect again.

CHESTER

Well, we are all in the same boat. From now on we must steer for easier seas.

MRS. STETSON

Somebody in this room has chosen her Captain.

STETSON

Miss Myrtle! *(Goes over to shake hands with her.)* I wish you much happiness. It will always be a pleasure to us to think that this happened beneath our roof. Elkins, *(as* CHESTER *goes up to* MYRTLE *and talks to her)* you are a lucky fellow. I congratulate you. Some twenty years ago—— *(He passes his hand across his brow.)* Ah! what changes in twenty years. But for you it must be Full Speed Ahead! Only remember the precious freight you have charge of, and steer clear of the rocks that wrecked me.

MRS. STETSON

Quite a speech for Richard!

CHESTER

(turning to STETSON *as* MYRTLE *seats herself)*

We are all going to steer carefully in future. We are not derelicts by any means. Our owners

(pointing to his wife) still have faith in us. And it takes more than the loss of his money to keep down an American. Why, man! We are both in the prime of life. We shall yet beat these young people. Think how full our country is of opportunities. The air awaits our galleons; imprisoned spirits cry to us from beneath our mountains; innumerable blessings lie hid within the soil. All around us we see the prairie developing into villages, the villages becoming towns, towns becoming cities; and, in the over-swollen metropolis, the peddler can work his way into the ranks of merchant princes. A man can do anything, become anything in this country if he only be a man! Let us have faith in ourselves. From all parts of the world people come to us, knowing that America means progress, means success. Stetson, we must determine to get in line. The best is yet to be.

[*The men find seats.*

MYRTLE

Think of John quoting Browning!

MRS. STETSON

It is because there are lovers in the room.

CHESTER

A change has come over us all, Myrtle. You have yet to learn the possibilities within the American man.

MRS. CHESTER

And in the American woman, too.

ELKINS

She's the best of the lot.

MRS. STETSON

Not exactly that, but she could make herself the best. The day comes in a woman's life when she finds that gadding about playing bridge, sipping tea and talking gossip, and running with wealthier women so as to be seen in their company is not the end for which the individual was created. She finds out that earning money is not picking it up on the street; and, when she learns that, she is not so willing to squander money on dress and frivolity, and give her protector nothing but her company at mealtime. A good woman will want to become her husband's companion, and only when she is that can there be true happiness in the home.

STETSON

Well, my dear, you will have a chance to stay at home now. False friends will fall away.

MYRTLE

So much the better, Mrs. Stetson. You will find true sympathy among the people Henry and I intend drawing around us—people who do things, or endeavor to do things. Idlers have no place in our country to-day, and an idle woman is more dangerous than an idle man.

CHESTER

Stetson and I have not been idlers, Myrtle.

MYRTLE

No, but—— [*She stops suddenly.*

MRS. CHESTER

Myrtle means that I have. And she is right.

MRS. STETSON

I, too, have been an idler.

STETSON

We have all been idlers in a way. We have let the fine things of life go by unnoticed. He is an

idler who has accomplished nothing, and, my God! what have I accomplished? I have forgotten the stars and the flowers; I have harmed my fellowmen. I have lived as if to-day were the only day, and money the only thing. And now I have lost it, and I've also lost——

CHESTER

(interrupting)

That is all to be forgotten, Stetson. We are both men again, not mere machines. We are beginning anew, you know.

ELKINS

Just as thousands are doing, and just as thousands have ever done. And, after all, is it fair to blame business men for having no higher ideal than to make money, and society women for having no higher ideal than to spend it? How many are there willing and able to get their ears and whisper: You are wasting time? When a thinking man is plucky enough to do that, he is called a bore or a sorehead.

CHESTER

Well, if he starts one man or one woman on the right path, he has done more than if he gives some

of his surplus wealth to charity, or founds a free library. When once people begin to think, they usually make up for lost time and think pretty hard.

MRS. STETSON

Let us hope our women begin pretty soon. Too many men are paying the price of our folly.

STETSON

We are equally culpable, my dear. But better days are coming. America is all right. Out of our turmoil and unrest something fine will evolve. We are the greatest people in the world to right a wrong when once it is brought home to us.

MYRTLE

That's fine, Mr. Stetson. I'm a true American, and believe in my own. So does Henry.

MRS. STETSON

Lovers should, my dear!

MRS. CHESTER

And we must have faith in ourselves. You, Myrtle, have your work, and it will always keep

you happy. But for women like myself, who have been idlers and triflers, there remains but one thing—to see that idling and trifling end in disaster; and that even if we can't write, or paint, or do great and noble things, we can at least regain our self-respect by trying to become earnest women.

CHESTER

(rising to take a cigarette from a box on the table)

You have always been that, my dear. *(He leans over his wife's chair.)* And Stetson will say the same thing of his wife. Our only regret will be that we can't surround you with the comforts you have been accustomed to *(she puts up her hand and takes his)*, and that life must be serious from now on.

MRS. STETSON

But more beautiful.

CHESTER

Yes, far more beautiful. We shall even have time to get acquainted with each other. But, Mabel, won't you miss your bridge friends, your electric, your subscription seats, and——

MRS. CHESTER

(interrupting)

No, no, no. Oh, John! you know I won't. I am so tired of it all. What I want is just home and you. The other seems a nightmare now, all so empty and heartless. You shall see what I can do. I have been so selfish all these years, but now I want only you. You shall see how gladly a woman gives up the sham when once she learns what the finer things are. I will show you that even a society doll has a heart, and that she can become a good wife and worthy of the best of men.

CHESTER

(releasing his hand and laying it tenderly on her hair)

My wife!

STETSON

You have expressed my wife's ideas, my dear Mrs. Chester, and the ideas of thousands of good women. Life doesn't look so dark after all. Of course, the street car is not so aristocratic as the electric, but our fathers and mothers seemed to be content with it, and so are nine people out of ten to-day. Riding with other people will make

us more human, more humane. It is not the rich that have the warmest hearts.

ELKINS

Hear that, Myrtle? Shall you be content with the gallery and the horse-car?

MYRTLE

Maybe my new book will prove a Best Seller?

ELKINS

I hope it may, but the man must pay the bills, you know.

MYRTLE

I don't know anything of the kind. True love means equality in all things.

MRS. STETSON

Now, don't quarrel to-night. Such matters will regulate themselves at the proper time. We are all going to begin the right way, a republic within a republic; being happy ourselves, we shall all endeavor to so influence others as to make them happy.

ACT FOURTH

CHESTER

We have certainly begun well to-night. Stetson, you and I are like sailors who have left a slowly sinking ship, and reach the land in safety. All their possessions go down, but they are glad to get off with their lives and a good scare. We have had our wreck, our scare; but we are all well, and still have that which is dearest to every man. Of course, it is a pity that we can learn only through disaster; but that is one of our characteristics, and it is certainly better to learn that way than never to learn at all.

STETSON

Whatever the future may contain for me, I'm done with speculation. For years I have lived with a sword hanging by a thread above my head. If speculation makes a few people wealthy, it makes thousands poor. It is a game at which only the few can win; and it only takes a turn of the wheel for that few to lose their money, too. America has become what it is by industry. The world depends on us. There is something for each one of us to do, something in legitimate lines. We need never fear competition at home while Europe has to be fed and clothed and supplied by us with almost everything it needs.

MRS. CHESTER

And we, who have had to learn the lesson along with you, who have been thoughtless and foolish, and have paid the price, have no fear of the future. There is so much that we can do to help you. I don't mean out on the street, but right in-doors. The man who does the work is entitled to a home —after the fight, the bivouac.

MRS. STETSON

If all American women only felt that way, our men would accomplish wonders, and the word failure would be unknown. *(She looks toward the vestibule.)* Ah! the bell.

ELKINS

It will be the steady grind for me. And only a few more days of liberty. *(He stretches his arms above his head, and rises.)* Say, Myrtle, don't you want to go for a ride? This has been a pretty serious evening. We have talked like highbrows. Mrs. Stetson will excuse us, I guess. It's a beautiful night.

MRS. STETSON

And the dark is calling, isn't it? Happy lovers! Yes, go along, both of you.

MYRTLE

I am very comfortable.

MRS. CHESTER

She is only teasing you, Henry. She wants you to coax a little.

STETSON

Be good to him, Miss Myrtle. He looks unhappy.

CHESTER

As if he had lost his job already.

ELKINS

Shut up! Come on, Myrtle.

MRS. STETSON

And tell your dreams beneath the stars. *(While she is speaking,* WALL *and* MISS FLORRIWELL *enter through the vestibule.* MYRTLE, *who was about to rise, looks at* HENRY, *laughs, and retains her seat.* MRS. STETSON *and the men rise.* MRS. STETSON *greets* MISS FLORRIWELL, *and the men exchange bows. The women nod.)* Miss Florriwell! I am glad to see you. We have had a cele-

bration dinner. And beneath our roof a love affair has had its culmination. Myrtle and Henry Elkins are engaged.

MISS FLORRIWELL

How fine! *(Goes over to* MYRTLE.*)* My dear, I am so glad.

[*She takes a seat beside* MYRTLE, *and converses quietly. The men and* MRS. STETSON *are still standing.*

WALL

(from where he stands)

Same here, Miss Myrtle. Elkins, you don't deserve her.

[*He places a chair for* MRS. STETSON.

STETSON

He was just trying to take her away.

WALL

Ah! I know how he feels.

MRS. CHESTER

You?

WALL

Certainly. Why not, pray?

MRS. CHESTER

Well, you old bachelors are not supposed to understand the tender emotions.

WALL

A fallacy, my dear lady, I assure you.

MRS. CHESTER

A simulated appreciation, perhaps?

STETSON

That's what you get for being a bachelor, Wall; an object of suspicion to everybody.

CHESTER

An object of pity!

WALL

(dramatically)

Scoff on! I remain unscathed.

ELKINS

And hardened.

WALL

(protestingly)

Allow me, my dear ladies. There is one who certainly does not think me hopeless.

MRS. STETSON

More surprises?

WALL

And not the last, I assure you. But our own affairs always seem of the greatest importance. Miss Florriwell *(*MISS FLORRIWELL *seems to enter more animatedly into conversation with* MYRTLE, *and takes her hand)*, may I take our friends into our confidence?

MYRTLE

(to MISS FLORRIWELL*)*

Oh! I know. Your hand is trembling.

[*Kisses her.*

MRS. STETSON AND MRS. CHESTER

(simultaneously)

Miss Florriwell!

Ann!

WALL

Yes. My Ann! You see, Miss Florriwell has taken pity on me, and an hour ago——

ELKINS

(interrupting)

It was in the air.

WALL

And an hour ago honored me by promising to become my wife. *(*CHESTER, STETSON, *and* ELKINS *immediately press around* MISS FLORRIWELL.*)* Of course, I'm the happiest man in the world——

ELKINS

(interrupting, and calling out from the men around MISS FLORRIWELL*)*

Bar one, old man. Don't forget I'm still here.

WALL

Bar none. So now, Mrs. Chester, you see I can well say that I know how happy this roysterer feels.

[*The men separate again.*

MRS. STETSON

Miss Florriwell, come and take this chair by me. Myrtle has had you long enough. *(*MISS FLORRIWELL *takes the seat.)* Now you and I and Mrs. Chester can chat together. Henry seems to be jealous of you.

[CHESTER *shakes hands with* WALL *and talks quietly.*

STETSON

Surprises are certainly coming quickly to-night. One engagement, then another. I think we must drink to the happiness of the brides to be. Twenty years ago—Ah! I said that before. *(He laughs, and leaves the room, entering the dining-room.)* Oh, Elkins, come here a minute.

ELKINS

Excuse me, Mrs. Stetson. I think I've heard that call before.

[*He goes after* STETSON. CHESTER *and* WALL *take seats.*

MISS FLORRIWELL

Yes, I can't tell you how happy I am. And in a few days we are to be married, and then we are going away.

MRS. STETSON

(taking her hand)

We have known each other for so many years. You have seen us up, and now you see us down. But this is one of the happiest evenings of my life.

WALL

And it is yet to be made happier, my dear Mrs. Stetson.

MRS. CHESTER

Why! what is the next surprise?

WALL

Ah! That must be kept secret a while longer.

MRS. STETSON

I cannot imagine more good news. Myrtle's engagement, yours, and our determination to live a sane and simple life.

WALL

And you regret nothing?

MRS. STETSON

No, indeed. I feel thirty again.

WALL

And you, Mrs. Chester?

CHESTER

I will answer for her. We both feel as if a load had been removed from our shoulders.

MRS. STETSON

(looking at CHESTER*)*

A load of gratitude is on ours, dear friend.

MRS. CHESTER

But that must sit so lightly as to be unnoticed. We decided not to talk of it again.

[ELKINS *and* STETSON *enter, the one bearing a silver tray and glasses, the other the wine.*

STETSON

Here we are. Have we been gone long?

CHESTER

Too long for Henry, I guess.

[ELKINS *places the tray on the table, and* STETSON *opens the wine.*

STETSON

Well, we are all united again now. If there is a roomful of happier people in town, I'd like to know it.

[*He starts to fill the glasses.*

WALL

One can always add to happiness, you know.

MYRTLE

Just hear him! And engaged only an hour!

STETSON

(still filling the glasses)

No. Let us be content as we are. Now, Elkins, get busy. We are going to drink to the happiness of the engaged couples.

WALL

(while ELKINS *and* STETSON *hand around the glasses)*

Wait!

[*He rises.*

MRS. CHESTER

Ah! The fresh surprise.

WALL

Yes. A surprise.

STETSON

What's that?

MRS. STETSON

Mr. Wall says he has another surprise for us.

WALL

Yes; for you and your husband, Mrs. Stetson. *(Turning to* MRS. CHESTER.*)* And for you and yours, Mrs. Chester. *(*CHESTER *rises agitatedly, and* STETSON *puts down his glass and leans against a chair.)* Quite a surprise.

CHESTER

What is it, Wall?

WALL

It was only natural for me to tell you of my own good fortune first. A man of my age isn't accepted every day.

STETSON

Go on!

WALL

(tantalizingly)

Now, don't hurry me. I refuse to be hurried. It brings on indigestion. And a wine like this *(he smells the glass he is holding)* should be enjoyed to the full. Ah! the bouquet is perfect!

MRS. CHESTER

(imploringly)

Mr. Wall!

WALL

(seriously)

There! I have to have my little joke. Really good news is good to keep for a time. *(He turns*

to STETSON.*)* Stetson, I won't bother all of you with the details now, but I have heard that Morton is safe. *(*STETSON *takes a step towards him, and* CHESTER *ejaculates* "Ah!"*)* A stock he was interested in has gone up for some reason or other. Heavy English buying after our market was closed. You probably understand it better than I.

STETSON

My God! London has bought after all. That means that I——

WALL

(interrupting him quietly)

Are undoubtedly saved.

STETSON

And it means that my deal has gone through.

WALL

Undoubtedly. In fact I know it has. I have received a wire to act as attorney for the English buyers, and secure certain papers from you in return for the money which is to be paid over to you in my presence. I learnt all this just as I

was leaving for Miss Florriwell. That is why we came over here.

MISS FLORRIWELL

Not entirely, Heron.

WALL

That's so. However *(to* STETSON*)*, you know now.

STETSON

(to CHESTER*)*

And that means that I can repay you everything, Chester.

CHESTER

(putting out his hand)

It would all have been the same, Stetson. But for the sake of those we love, this is good news.

WALL

I guess there will be an Extra about it before long. The newspapers are bound to hear of it through someone.

STETSON

(sits down heavily)

My God! It can't be true. I feel faint.

WALL

Brace up. I'm telling you the truth. *(Lightly.)* This is what you get for being a broker; up one minute; down the next; then up again.

MRS. STETSON

(to her husband)

Oh! never, never again. I love you too much, dear——

CHESTER

(interrupting)

No, never again, Mrs. Stetson. *(To his wife.)* Mabel, you know what this good news means?

MRS. CHESTER

Yes, John.

CHESTER

But you don't want me to enter the ring again? You don't want to go back to the old life?

MRS. CHESTER

Never, never, never. And neither will Mrs. Stetson. We have made our resolutions, and we are going to abide by them.

STETSON

(rising again)

Wall, you have indeed told us good news. I am more grateful to you than I can say. *(He looks at* CHESTER, *who smiles back at him.)* You deserve all your happiness. I have been taught a lesson. And from now on I shall live only for her *(pointing to his wife)* and to do a little good. In a few days I'll have cashed in everything, and then for a useful life. Chester, old man—— *(Emotion prevents him from concluding.)*

CHESTER

You've expressed my sentiments. Now I think it is about time to do what we started out to do.

ELKINS

Hear! hear!

MYRTLE

(reprovingly)

Now, Henry, only a little, mind!

CHESTER

Take up your glass, Stetson. Shall I say it? Well! Here's to the brides to be! And as all of us owe that *(looking at* WALL*)* regenerated bachelor something, we will include the prospective husbands in our toast. May they all be very happy.

[*The toast is drunk.*

MRS. STETSON

So we are not to be poor, after all.

MRS. CHESTER

But we are no longer going to be idlers and wasters. I have learnt the lesson. I guess I can be of service in one way or another.

CHESTER

(placing his arm around his wife)

We will learn how together, Mabel.

MYRTLE

And you can give your big dinner, Mrs. Stetson.

MRS. STETSON

No, that can stay off now. Besides *(looking at* WALL*)*, the best man wouldn't be there.

CHESTER

Now, Stetson, you have cause for jealousy.

STETSON

We will call him that. He has made us all feel good to-night. What can we do for him?

ELKINS

I know what will please him. Promise not to tie ribbons on their baggage, or——

WALL

(interrupting)

You see, his mind is dwelling on what may happen to him before long.

MRS. CHESTER

Never mind, Henry. It never lasts long. And if the cost of living keeps on going up, people may become less prodigal with rice.

MYRTLE

I think you are all horrid.

MISS FLORRIWELL

So do I, dear. The wine must have gone to their heads.

[*While she is speaking, a newsboy's voice is heard in the distance.*

CHESTER

(holding up his hand)

Listen!

[*The voice sounds nearer and clearer, and presently one hears the words,* "Extry! Morton still on top. Extry!"

STETSON

It's true. It has all been an awful nightmare. I, too, have learnt the lesson. Chester, let's shake again. *(They grasp hands.)* But what can we do for Wall?

WALL

Nothing, except to wish us well. And yet, wait! There is one thing you can do, and it's the right and proper thing, too.

STETSON AND CHESTER

(as the others all lean forward and listen to his answer)

What's that?

WALL

Promise to make me godfather to the Stetsons and Chesters to be, and—live up to your promise!

[*He puts his arm around* MISS FLORRIWELL, *and amid general laughter and cheers the curtain descends.*

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